



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



3433 07490258 0



L.C.

Macquoid
NCW



62 17
Ch

THE HAUNTED FOUNTAIN.

and

Betty's revenge.

3
A NOVEL.

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.

Author of "At the Red Glove," etc.

M300339

MERCANTILE LIBRARY,

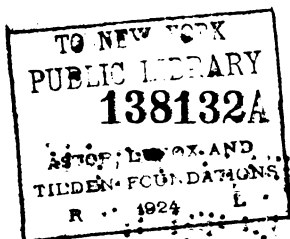
OF NEW YORK.

(1890)
NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH STREET, CORNER MISSION PLACE

DONATED BY THE
MERCANTILE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
NEW YORK CITY



COPYRIGHT, 1890,
BY
JOHN W. LOVELL.

MERCANTILE LIBRARY,

OF NEW YORK

THE HAUNTED FOUNTAIN

PROLOGUE.

THE sun had had his own way all day long ; not so much as a cloud had ventured to dispute his possession of the deep blue sky. The cracks on the parched ground seemed to widen under the scorching blaze ; the chestnut-trees in the park of the château drooped their great leaves as if the August day had been too much for them ; the slates on the cottage just within the park looked many-colored in the sunshine. In the small field behind the cottage the fragile stems of white buckwheat blossoms gleamed like threads of blood. It seemed surprising that the bunches of green filberts, nestling in the hedge round the little homestead, had not browned under so much heat.

A large chestnut-tree threw broad masses of shadow over the hot clay front of the cottage. A boy with a sunburnt face stood leaning against the chestnut trunk, as if he found the leaf-shelter welcome. The lad was thirteen, and well grown ; but he was thin and plain. The earnestness of his face, and a certain resolute look, made it remarkable, and one forgot his sallow complexion and irregular features. A child sat on a little stool beside him, in every way a perfect contrast to her companion. She was only nine

years old, and she looked like a little fairy; tiny, delicate features, eyes of golden hazel, looking up through shadowy, auburn lashes, with seemingly a tear ready to fall from them; a skin like a pale rose-leaf; hair, as much of it as her close-fitting linen cap allowed to be seen, bright auburn. She kept her eyes fixed on the boy's face, and two hot, bright tears fell on her lilac pinafore.

His eyes had not left her. "Why do you cry, Liline?" he said, tenderly.

"If you were a girl you would cry too."

There was archness in the sweet voice. Liline had sharp eyes, and she knew that Gustave had hard work to keep his tears back. She went on, however, sadly:

"It is so much better for you, you know; you are going back to Paris, and in the holidays you will come to the château and be happy; but I shall never see you again, never"—she shook her head.

"I shall not come back," the boy said, firmly. "I shall not care to come when you are not here; but it is nonsense to say that you will not see me again; you are my wife, Liline, and I am your husband. When I can make a home for you, I shall find out where you are, and I shall marry you."

He was not looking at Liline now, his eyes were fixed on the great fan-like leaves overhead; for all his manful determination there was real tears in his dark, sunken eyes.

Liline moved her stool closer to him, and then she nestled her lovely little face against the sunburnt *band that* hung down beside him.

"Dear Gustave," she murmured, "dear Gustave"—she rubbed softly against him.

He pinched her cheek; but after that he stood silent. He had nothing to begin life with but a determined will, a strong power of self-control, and a warm love for all that seemed to him good and true; but Gustave Chauvin was an orphan, and he owed his education and his entire support to his mother's cousin, the Marquis de Vougay. The marquis was dead, but he had invested a sum of money to be applied to the education and placing in life of his cousin's son, Gustave Chauvin.

Many people said that when they were young, the marquis and his cousin, Marie de Vougay, had been deeply attached, but that as the house of De Vougay had lost much of its former wealth, the young marquis had been compelled to make a wealthy marriage; and that his cousin, Mademoiselle Marie, had remained single ten years for his sake; then, being of age to do what she pleased, she married Gustave Chauvin, a young cavalry officer, who died when his son was an infant, and before he had time to make a suitable provision for him. Marie Chauvin soon followed her husband, and the Marquis de Vougay took the charge of her child upon himself.

Gustave had been brought up with his second cousin Lucien. Since her husband's death, the Marquise de Vougay had tried to follow out his wishes by treating the orphan as if he really were her second son. Gustave was so steady and truthful, so honorable, and so persevering, that she really found more comfort in him than she did in her own handsome

Lucien. Without any decided vices, Lucien was a scapegrace; his love of amusement led him into frolicsome escapades, that more than once had nearly caused his expulsion from college; and he was never trusted, as Gustave was, alone in the old château in Brittany, under the joint care of the steward, Étienne, the curé, Monsieur Édouin, and the garde champêtre, Basil Grignan, Liline's maternal grandfather.

It was not from any neglect that Madame de Vougay had sent the young fellow to the château these last two summer holidays. She had been warned by Lucien's tutor that although there was affection between the cousins, there was no sympathy, and that Lucien's example was very bad for Gustave. So in the holidays the marquise had paid visits to her friends, and had sent Lucien and his tutor on their travels. She had never visited the old Breton château since her husband's death; but Gustave loved it, and in sending him there she considered that she had cared for him in all ways; Monsieur le Curé would be his companion, Étienne would provide for all his bodily comforts, and old Basil would help him to make war on the rabbits, and in any outdoor sport he had a wish for. She did not know that little Liline Vivier was the attraction that made Gustave's life so happy at Vougay.

Liline was only a child, but the boy was fascinated by her. He used to stand watching her exquisite little face, now sparkling with sunny smiles, or else pensive with tearful eyes, though the sight of Gustave usually brightened her into content. Then her talk was so quaint and pretty, and all her little ways

were as dainty as her face was. When he went back to Paris, Gustave used to dream about the bewitching little creature. Sometimes he fancied he could feel her tiny hand in his, or see her flying like a little fairy as they played hide-and-seek beneath the chequered light and shade of the chestnuts in the woods at Vougay. He never spoke of Liline to any one, but the quiet boy said to himself: "Yes, I have only to work and to do right, and when the time comes I shall marry Liline, and I shall see her always."

She was his aim in life, and, young as he was, she was the mainspring of his diligence and of his success in his classes. To him Liline was perfect; he longed to take her away from the old grandfather who often scolded her, and to help her in the care required by her invalid mother.

Her grandfather had lately died. A new garde had been appointed, and in a few days Liline and her mother were going to an aunt near Rouen. They would stay there, Monsieur le Curé said, till Liline's father, Baptiste Vivier, had served his time in the army, then, perhaps, they would go elsewhere; but Baptiste would not get his discharge for eight years or so.

"Can you write, Liline?" Gustave said, presently. "You said you were going to learn, you know."

Liline shook her head.

"The road was so bad all the winter I could not go to school. My aunt will teach me herself she says."

"Has your aunt any employment?"

Liline hung her head.

"Yes," she pouted, "she is an embroideress, and she says she shall teach me also to embroider ; but I shall not like it, it will be so dull. How can I run and jump as I do now ? I must sit still and sew—sew—sew."

She gave him a lovely smile, as she mimicked the close attention and the rapid, deft stitches she had watched in her aunt's work.

For a minute it seemed hard to Gustave that this playful, pretty creature should have to do anything she disliked, and then his natural independence helped his judgment.

"But, Liline," he said, "if your aunt is going to do so much for you, it will be well to do something for her ; and look here, you must learn to write very soon, then you can send me a letter now and then."

She laughed at this ; but the sadness came into her face again, and Gustave saw how much she grieved at leaving Vougay.

"After all," he said, in a cheerful tone, "this has not always been your home, dear child. Your mother says, till you were four years old you lived in Normandy."

Lilene looked at him fixedly.

"I'll tell you something, Gustave."

"Is it a secret ?" He bent down and put his ear to her lips.

She shook her head and gently pushed him away.

"No—I always forget grandfather's dead—it was only a secret from grandfather. This is my secret—I want to see Monsieur Lucien, and now, of course, *there is no chance*. Why are you frowning, Gustave ?"

"Am I?"

He was ashamed of the sudden annoyance that took possession of him.

"Yes. Why should I not want to see Monsieur Lucien? He will be lord and master here when he is older. He will be called Monsieur le Marquis. Mother says he is beautiful and rich; he will never have to work. Ah, how happy he will be."

"Rich people are not always the happiest."

She looked at him doubtingly.

"You are wise very often, grandfather said you were wise; but you are sometimes wrong, Gustave. Grandfather told me that was the use of another life after this. He said rich people will not be happiest there, as they are here. I know Lucien will be happy when he is master of Vougray. Yes, and he will have a beautiful lady for his wife, and she will have nothing to do but to put on new gowns and look at herself in the glass 'all day long.' Ah, mon Dieu, think of that"—her little face was pathetic.

Gustave burst out laughing.

"And you think that would be enough to make any one happy, eh, Liline?"

She drew up her little figure and said, gravely:

"Of course, it would make me very happy, but I could not have told grandfather, you know, he always scolded me for being vain."

Gustave stooped down and kissed her forehead. "You are a dear little goose," he said, "but I am not sure that you would like Lucien. He does not care for children. Now I am going off to Monsieur le Curé; he is teaching me to play chess. Good-bye

till to-morrow, dear little one." He nodded, and was soon out of sight among the trees.

"Why should not Lucien like me?" Liline looked very thoughtful. "Every one likes me, so of course Lucien will; we shall see"—she gave a deep sigh—"no, I forgot, I shall never see Lucien because I am going away from Chateau Vougay."

CHAPTER I.

IN PARIS.

A LARGE, dull room at the back of a great house in Paris. The walls are dark, but the mirrors on two sides lighten them. The furniture and the hangings are good and tasteful, but these have plainly come together by accident, relegations from several better rooms in the vast house. Their haphazard quality makes one at first sight mistake this chamber in the Hôtel de Vougay for a room in a lodging-house.

The three persons in the room were as incongruous as the furniture was. A dark-haired woman stood at a window, and two other persons, a middle-aged man and a girl, were beside a table littered with cuttings of silk and muslin, some of which had fallen upon the polished wood floor. Any one who had seen Liline Vivier as a child would have recognized her lovely little face in the girl who stood talking to a bronzed, rough-looking man, with close-cropped hair and an almost red moustache, in which a few white hairs asserted themselves. Baptiste Vivier looked older than he was. He had received a severe wound in the thigh, and having got his discharge from the army, had come to Paris to claim Liline from her kind mistress, Madame de Vougay. Liline was just seventeen. Her mother did not long survive the removal to Rouen, and the girl had lived with her *aunt till two years ago*, when her old friend, Monsieur

Édouin, the curé, had found her a post in the Hôtel de Vougay.

The marquise fancied herself a poet, and she was in want of a secretary to set down her ideas as they flitted through her brain. The curé assured the lady that a girl of Liline's age, who could be treated as a child, and placed under the care of Madame de Vougay's maid Nathalie, would be in all ways more suitable as a secretary than a full-grown woman, who might attract the notice of the young master of Vougay. The marquise took her old friend's advice, but she smiled at his warning. She told him that her son, Lucien, was going to London with the new French Ambassador, and that he would certainly be away for two years.

Monsieur Édouin smiled back at her. He did not say that there were scandalous tales current about the young marquis.

"Take care that Liline is kept upstairs," he said, "and completely out of sight. She is only a child of fifteen, but she is attractive."

He did not fear that the girl might renew her childish acquaintance with Gustave Chauvin. He was now a civil engineer, and was busy railroad-making in Spain.

Perhaps, if Monsieur Édouin had seen Liline to-day, he would have wondered how he could have sent such a rare bit of flesh and blood to Paris.

Liline was fair, and she had little color on her cheeks; but the warm blood flushed up when her father told her he was proud to own such a daughter, *her yellow-brown eyes had a grateful glow, as she looked sweetly up in his bronzed face.* "How soon

can you be ready, my child?" Baptiste Vivier said.

The poor man had been so long parted from his home—except for rare visits few and far between—that he hungered to find himself once more beside a hearth of his own, with his beautiful child for companion. He looked at Liline in simple wonder. Truly she was like his dearly loved Caroline; but then she was much more beautiful than Caroline had ever been. Liline's self-possession, and her pretty, dainty ways, made him feel unworthy to be her father.

Liline turned towards the woman near the window. "How soon can I be ready, Nathalie?"

His daughter's familiar tone greatly impressed Baptiste Vivier. Mademoiselle Nathalie, who had received him yesterday on his arrival, had seemed to him a superior being. He had spoken to her as if she were a lady. He looked at his child with increased reverence.

"If I help you," Nathalie answered, in a purring voice, "you can be ready in less than an hour."

"Thank you," Liline said.

Baptiste noticed that although Mademoiselle Nathalie spoke softly, she did not smile, her sallow, shrunken face was like a mask, which would have been ugly but for her bright black eyes and a profusion of well-kept hair. Nathalie was plainly dressed, but her black gown showed a well-made figure, and there was a good deal of expression in her eyes in spite of her seeming self-restraint.

She went out, and Liline followed her into the next room, which looked into the front courtyard. A box stood half packed near the window, and some

chairs beside the box were heaped with a variety of articles. Liline began to fold some of these, while Nathalie knelt down before the box and deftly arranged in smaller space all that the girl had already placed there. It was a chilly spring morning, and the window was closed ; but Liline was excited, and the room felt warm to her. She went to the window, opened it, and then she stood musing over the strange change which had come into her life since yesterday afternoon. She had grown so tired of her monotonous occupation and of her dull shut-up life with Nathalie, that yesterday, when Madame de Vougay told her she had to choose between her present life and a cottage home with her father, Liline had not hesitated. She said at once she was ready and willing to leave the Hôtel de Vougay. Since then she had talked with her father, and his affection and his admiring deference had delighted her. Nathalie's constant jealousy made her sometimes spiteful to Liline, and the girl felt delighted with the prospect of freedom.

Nathalie steadily went on packing ; but a sound in the court-yard below drew Liline's eyes down to the flight of steps in front of the entrance.

A gentleman was getting off his horse. He flung his reins to the groom, and then he came slowly up the steps. Liline saw that he looked very handsome. He was pale, and he seemed languid ; his eyes and fair hair and regular features reminded the girl of some face she had seen.

"Ah," she said, as a memory flashed on her, and she leaned out of window.

In an instant she felt Nathalie's arm round her

waist, she was pulled back and the window was shut.

Nathalie's eyes looked very angry.

"Foolish, imprudent child," she said, "it is indeed time you left the house; actually you have exposed yourself to attract the observation of a stranger."

Liline freed herself; then she curled her red full lips.

"I hate you," she said, coldly; "he would have looked up if you had kept quiet, and he would have seen me."

"And if he had, you vain puss, the gentleman would have gone away again as wise as he came."

Liline held up her round finger in rebuke, and shook her head.

"You are telling a story, Nathalie. You know who that was as well as I do. It was Monsieur Lucien himself. Chut! I know it. He is so like his mother, and so like the portrait that hangs in madame's room. How spiteful you are, Nathalie, when you know how I have always longed to see him. I have a great mind to stay here."

Liline stood still, swelling with anger, but Nathalie did not answer her. The woman finished packing with surprising quickness, then she rang and ordered a fly to take the Viviers and their baggage to the railway station. She also sent for Baptiste, and while she did all this she never once lost sight of Liline. She stayed beside her, and followed her down the back staircase, and saw Baptiste hand the girl into the fly. Then, as father and daughter were driven out of the court-yard, Nathalie smiled.

"That was a narrow escape," she said. "If Monsieur Lucien had seen her he would have followed her to Vougay."

CHAPTER II.

AT THE COTTAGE.

IT is autumn again, and the chestnut leaves have begun to turn color ; some of them lie dead at the foot of the huge, grey trunk, that shows its stout, twisted limbs far more plainly than it did ten years ago, on that hot August day, when Gustave and Liline talked under its shadow.

There is a change, too, in the cottage. An extra room has been added on each of the two floors, to the clay wall that faced the original dwelling. This addition, built of logs, has larger windows than any belonging to the old house, which, indeed, had been content with only one small window in front, and with the light that came in through the arched top of the entrance door, the upper half of which always stood open in day-time. It is true that a larger window at the back shed light into the long, low room, clay-floored, with a rack of provisions fixed to the ceiling beam, and box-beds in the wall on either side the hearth. Ten years ago this long kitchen had been all sufficient as living and sleeping room for the old garde, his invalid daughter, and her little Liline. The woman who cooked for them and tidied up the place had lived some way off, in a cottage near the church.

Since then a new garde had occupied the old

house, and had died there just before Baptiste Vivier got his discharge from the army.

Madame de Vougay felt it hard that Liline should be so willing to leave her, but she was too kind to send the girl back to the clay-floored cottage, fresh from the luxuries to which two years in Paris had accustomed her. It was by the marquise's orders that these additional rooms had been constructed, and while they were preparing, the father and daughter received permission to occupy some of the out-of-the-way rooms in the château.

The afternoon sun was so level that the chestnut-tree no longer screened his light. It came in at the wide window, and fell full on Liline's bright auburn hair as she sat bending over her needlework. It seemed to be easy work enough ; she was sewing a lace frill into the collar of a neat-looking black silk gown that lay across her knees, and yet she gave a deep sigh as she ended her task. She put her thimble away in her work-basket and looked out of window. The light made her crown of auburn hair glorious. It became a red-gold as the last gleams fell on it, and, by contrast, her fair skin looked paler than usual.

She had fulfilled her early promise. At nineteen she was as lovely a girl as could easily be found, although just now the beauty of her golden brown eyes was spoiled by their discontent ; her lips, too, looked as if they wanted to quarrel. She put her hand in her pocket and pulled out a note. First she held it to her nose and said " Ah " with satisfaction as she smelled the perfumed paper, then she looked for a minute at the coronets on the envelope and at the

heading of the note, and then she read the delicate writing slowly through—the third reading since it had reached her. It was very short.

“DEAR CHILD” (it said), “you have, no doubt, heard that I was coming to Vougay. I have taken every one by surprise—and here I am. Your successor, Mademoiselle la Bouillerie, was too ill to accompany me, and it may be some weeks before she is well enough to come. Tell your father he must spare you to me while I am at Vougay ; at least you must come to me while I am alone. I expect you to-morrow at ten o’clock. Etienne will send for your clothes.

“ Your friend,

“ ANNE DE VOUGAY.”

Liline kissed the letter and her discontent fled.

“ Father will spare me—he must, the letter will show him how sweet she is : ah, why did I ever leave her ? ”

She replaced the note in the envelope and put it carefully on the little mantel-shelf ; she looked at herself in the mirror above it. Liline smiled at what she saw, and a pretty pink flush came into her cheek ; she felt that she was much prettier now than when she left the marquise two years ago, and they had not met since that time. The blush was not all pleasure ; Liline was a little ashamed, too. She looked at her hands—they were sunburnt, and she was not sure that the marquise would like to see her with so much color in her cheeks. In the confined life she had led in Paris Liline had become pale. She had lived in

two rooms, and, except on Sundays and on festivals, had taken her exercise in the garden of the Hôtel de Vougay ; even when she did go out with an old staid *bonne*, the girl had become utterly weary of her seclusion in the midst of life, and when her father asked her to come to him, she had felt overjoyed, almost wild with delight at the prospect of freedom.

Liline went back to the window, and standing by it, she peered—her eyes shaded by her well-shaped hand—in search of her father's tall figure among the trees.

"How late he is," she said, fretfully ; "oh, if he would only come."

She thought of him impatiently, angrily even. He stood between her, she thought, and all the refinements and luxuries which, in their absence, she had learned to long after. As she looked forward—with a desire that every moment became more passionate—to find herself once more installed in her former post, those long days of wearisome imprisonment were forgotten ; all those heart-sick longings for the freedom she had enjoyed with her aunt, and before that in her childhood, were blotted out. She now only remembered how soon she had tired of her father's company, and of his oft-repeated camp stories ; she forgot how nice he had seemed at first, when his devotion to her was something new and unusual. He was kind to her, but he was too careful. On Sundays, as they came out of church, if one of the young farmers looked at her, Baptiste always hurried on ; and he never offered to take her to any *pardon* or fête. It is true that Vougay was an isolated place, too small to have a

fête of its own, and very far distant from the next hamlet.

Her father was slightly lame, and he did not possess a horse, or perhaps he might have given her this pleasure. She considered he was selfish, and that he wished to keep her at home. In the two long winters she had passed with him, Liline had found life even duller than it used to be in the Hôtel de Vougay. She was spared those long hours of writing from the marquise's dictation, but she had no decided occupation, nor had she the occasional chance of reading in secret one of the novels devoured by Nathalie.

Wonderful things happened in those stories to girls who had unusual beauty; and as the long dull days went on Liline became more and more addicted to the contemplation of her own increasing loveliness, the fresh country air and abundant exercise had developed it in a surprising manner, and she frequently told herself that she was very pretty, and that she looked far more like a lady than like the daughter of a garde champêtre. She had noticed, as she stood before the glass, that when she felt discontented, a line came in the soft flesh between her delicate eyebrows; she remembered this now, and she left off frowning as she stood at the window.

To the left the chestnut-trees made a sort of grove, and coming across the rough ground below them, she saw her father, his straw hat and his shoulders in deep shadow, while the many buttons of his gaiters and brown velveteen breeches caught the gleaming *sunbeams*. His frank, genial face glowed with pleasure

at the sight of Liline watching for his return. Baptiste was not a Breton, although he had taken a Breton wife, and he wore his hair cut almost as short as when he was a soldier. He held himself upright, and one scarcely noticed his lameness as he walked, looking now and then over his shoulder to make sure that Didi, a small brown mongrel, was at his heels.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

LILINE went forward to the door; in her heart she knew that she had not expected her father so soon, and she smiled as she held her forehead for his kiss.

He patted her on the shoulder. "Well, my darling, what has been happening? Has all gone well?"

"Yes, father."

Liline had planned the best way of getting his consent to Madame Vougay's request. Her novels had taught her always to avoid argument with a hungry man, and she had added a slice of ham to her father's supper, so that he might be extra content.

It seemed to her that he looked excited when he presently joined her in the kitchen, and took his place at the long wooden table, at one end of which was a homespun cloth; on this stood the steaming soup-bowls and the rest of the supper. But Baptiste was silent till she gave him his pipe. Then he placed himself on a bench beside the hearth, and began to smoke vigorously, while Liline cleared away the remains of the supper. It was almost the only household work she did, as a matter of course.

Marie Jeanne did far more work in the house than old Barbe had ever done for the poor invalid mother years ago, but Marie Jeanne went away before supper. It is true that she was not yet forty, and that Barbe,

her grandmother, had always been old ; but Liline's mother had been very gentle and easily pleased, and had put up with much discomfort and negligence. Certainly, Liline never complained ; but she had a dainty little way of shrugging her shoulders, and looking fixedly at things that were dirty or dusty, which impressed Marie Jeanne, and the poor ugly woman was so bewitched with her young mistress' beauty, that it seemed to her she could never try hard enough to please Liline.

To-night Liline felt degraded as she washed and wiped the bowls and plates.

"It is not fit work for me," she thought, "it spoils my hands ; Marie Jeanne ought not to go home so soon."

"Liline, have you heard any news?" Baptiste was holding his pipe between his finger and thumb. He had been watching his daughter's sad, serious face.

She looked quickly at him, and she felt sure that he had heard of the châtelaine's arrival.

"Yes, I was waiting to tell you. I have a note from madame herself."

Her eyes sparkled. Baptiste had not seen her look so gay for months, and he felt rejoiced.

"That is good ; that is kind of Madame la Marquise—very kind. She did not arrive till three o'clock. She slept last night at Morlaix. Well, my child, you must go up to-morrow or next day, and pay your respects." He went on smoking.

Liline's cheeks flushed, she could hardly hide her contempt ; the notion that her father could teach her

how to behave to her benefactress was so very absurd ! What could such an old, rough soldier know about behavior to a lady ?

"She has sent for me, father, to go at once. Listen, I will read the note."

The smile left his bronzed face while he listened, and Liline might have seen his heavy grey moustache quiver, as if the lips beneath were in pain. He stretched his large hand out to take the letter. But Liline drew back. "I will read it again. You might grease it, and it is so sweet and nice, so just like her, dear lady."

Baptiste was frowning now, and she felt a little nervous. She came forward again, and held the letter open before him, so that he might read it himself.

When he had finished, he looked steadily at Liline, and read her face as carefully as he had read the dainty writing of the marquise. His chest heaved, and a strange, fixed look came into his face, a look that his comrades used to notice in the face of Baptiste Vivier before he went into action.

"Do you wish to do this, child?" He said it tenderly ; but Liline felt sure that he did not want to let her go.

"Yes, father," she said, firmly, "I wish it more than I can say."

Baptiste sighed, then he frowned again ; finally he put his pipe between his lips, and puffed out a volume of smoke. "When I came back," he began to speak, with his pipe in his mouth, so that the words sounded indistinct, "I noticed you were glad

to leave the lady, and——” He rose up, laid his pipe on the high mantelshelf, and clasped his hands behind his back.

Liline pouted, and she raised her eyes from the dainty note in her hand.

“I inquired about your life, my child,” Baptiste went on, “and you told me it was too dull to be borne. I ask myself, then, why does my girl wish to go back to this dull life?”

Liline looked away. The pain in his honest brown eyes hurt her; she could not bear to see it. She saw the reason he was giving to himself. He saw that he was not able to make her happy, and she could not contradict him. It was the truth.

There was freedom in her cottage life, and it was good for her health and her appetite; but she was heartily tired of her plain, monotonous meals, and she wanted variety. When she complained to Monsieur le Curé, he had asked her to visit a poor, blind woman, who lived in a cottage in the park; he said also, she could teach this poor creature's child to read. But Liline had answered him that her father required all her time at home. The curé saw that she came to church, and did all that could be expected of her; but, for all that, her answer troubled him, he feared that Baptiste must be selfish not to allow his daughter a little of her time to give to others.

“Father,” she said, after a pause, “would it not be ungrateful if I were to refuse to oblige madame. See how good she was about the house, and how much she did to make us comfortable, and she is all alone at the château.”

Baptiste looked hard at her. "Well, Liline," he said, "I don't want to be selfish, but as you have to live in a cottage, it is better to be content with it; I fancy the cottage is a safer place for you than the château."

"Safer! father, when I am to be alone with madame herself. What harm could I get from her?"

Her eyes were full of angry light, and her red lips looked rebellious.

Baptiste did not know how to answer the spoiled child, but he felt in a dim way that no good could come of this visit to the château; and then, while he stood dumbly staring at her, feeling that it would be selfish not to yield, as he could find no good reason to put in words, he remembered what the curé had said to him, when he met him two days before in the park. Monsieur Édouin had told him that Madame de Vougay was expected at the château. Then he added:

"Baptiste, my friend, do not let your daughter be idle. She will be happier and safer, too, if she has regular daily employment."

And Baptiste had answered: "She sews, monsieur, and—and—" for as he tried to think, he found it hard to recall what Liline did in the way of daily work—"she reads when she can get hold of a book."

The curé shook his head. "Reading and sewing are not the best employments for so attractive a girl," he said; "it would be better if she helped in the house-work or the cooking, or she might try to be of use to some of her poor neighbors, eh, my good friend?"

"She is free to do that, or anything else that pleases her; she is a good child, Monsieur le Curé, and I want her to please herself."

"So I see," the priest had said, drily. "Take care, my friend, that you are not teaching Liline to be selfish. A selfish woman is worse than a selfish man remember."

In the light of these words, Baptiste now saw that the girl was self-willed. He was disposed to indulge her; but it seemed to him that she ought to show some consideration for his wishes, and then he remembered that this was almost the first time he had thwarted her.

"Well!" she spoke impatiently, "say, father, that you will let me go."

Baptiste sighed. A feeling of anger rose against the beautiful creature who stood fronting him, her golden eyes full of demand rather than of supplication. In that moment he realized that that which had come to him before as a dim fear was the truth. Liline did not return the love he felt for her, she was indifferent to him; he saw that the smile with which she had greeted him a while ago, and for which the poor fellow had felt so grateful, had been only gladness that she could tell him her news. He felt tempted to say: "Go to the château, and stay there." He longed to reproach her with her coldness to him; but this was not the way in which Monsieur Édouin meant him to control his wayward child.

"I am going to tell you," he said, slowly.

Liline looked attentive. She recognized a new tone in her father's voice, a tone of authority, and it impressed her; but she wondered what it meant.

"I do not like you to go to the château, my child; but I see you wish it, and Liline, so far I have always tried to let you be happy in your own way; but understand me, you must not sleep in the château. I shall come every evening and fetch you home. I do not choose that you should sleep at Château Vougay."

She pressed her hands together, and bit her pretty lips with vexation.

"Father," she said, passionately.

Baptiste turned away. Her tone gave him courage, for he saw that Monsieur Édouin had spoken truly.

"It must be as I say, child," he said, firmly, "or else you had best stay at home." Then, as if he dreaded further opposition, Baptiste crossed the kitchen and went out.

Liline looked triumphant.

"At last," she said. "Monsieur le Marquis is sure to come to Vougay, and this time he *shall* see me, and he shall speak to me, too."

She looked very pretty as she nodded her fair head, pretty and determined, too.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRETARY.

THE clock was striking ten as Liline Vivier passed through the great open gates of Château Vougay. Yesterday, only an hour before the appointed time, news had come that the marquise would arrive at three o'clock; it was then found that the hinges of the great gates were so stiff from disuse, that the gates were opened with difficulty, and Mathrin, the gatekeeper, had not yet found it possible to get help to close them.

As Liline crossed the grass-grown outer court, a large dog came slowly forward; he was old and almost blind, but as he drew near the girl, his sullen aspect changed, his tail moved slowly, and when he came close, he fawned upon Liline and put his huge paws against her waist.

"Oh, Nero, go away—down, dirty dog," she cried; and indeed the dog's paws had left dark traces on the buff ground of her fresh cambric gown; then, as he opened his huge mouth in a welcoming bark, she called out in terror: "Poor Nero, good dog, is he glad to see me then?"

"Come away, Nero," a stern voice said, and Liline rejoiced to see the steward standing in the entrance of the stone screen that parted the outer court from the château.

She nodded and smiled at old Étienne, who was soft-hearted with regard to beauty. He took off his straw hat and made her a ceremonious bow.

"You are punctual, my child ; come in, our lady expects you."

He turned and crossed the inner court with her. The ground here was not quite so rough, and the round paddock in the centre, where the after-crop had stood, half a yard or so high, had been mown this morning, and the cut grass already looked grey against the tawny stubble. In front was the old grey château, some of its stones stained here and there a warmer hue with golden lichens, while over the rest was the frosted look of age. The grand entrance, of later date than the rest, had a pediment above the pillared portico. There were many windows all along the building, and the pile was crowned with a high slate roof, with dormer windows ; at the corners were round tourelles with black peaked roofs. The buildings right and left of the courts were much lower than the central portion, and at the right-hand corner, adjoining the screen, was the pointed roof and round apse of the chapel.

Liline looked about her with a glad feeling of recognition. This was much more like home to her than the house in the wood had been since her return to it. She followed Étienne, the steward, up the broad flight of steps into a large hall, where the flooring squares of black and white marble looked greenish with the damp of disuse, and a huge lamp hanging from the high ceiling was so festooned with cobwebs, that one might have fancied it was shrouded

in grey gauze. There were two doors on the left and three on the right. The staircase ended above in blankness, it went up from the middle of the hall to a large door on the landing ; but there was no gallery visible on either side of it, only blank grey walls. Two doors below flanked the staircase on either side and led to the offices.

The girl shivered a little as she entered the grim old house.

"Come this way, if you please, the steward said, and he opened one of the doors below the staircase. This led into a long passage lighted only from another room, at each end there was a spiral staircase.

Étienne pointed to the right.

"Go up there," he said, "you will meet Mademoiselle Nathalie at the top. Good-morning."

"Thank you," Liline said ; she felt suddenly timid ; even when she was living here for those few days she had always been afraid to explore the upper floor of the château. She knew there was nothing worth seeing upstairs, for all the furniture had been either taken away or was packed up, and Étienne had told her the place was full of bats and owls ; so she had contented herself with roaming about the lower rooms, and gazing at the portraits of dead de Vougaays.

When she reached the end of a gallery at the top of this back staircase, Liline's courage came back, for facing her was tall, dark Nathalie, with a fawning smile on her thin lips, and a keen, almost spiteful look in her black eyes. Liline had lost all fear of Nathalie long ago, when she discovered that Madame de Vougay preferred her to her *femme de chambre*.

"Ciell!" Nathalie raised her eye-brows in wonder, "to think how you have grown, mademoiselle; you do credit to country air."

The girl's beauty and her self-possessed manner had for a moment so imposed on Nathalie, that she said "mademoiselle" in spite of herself. She made haste, however, to rectify her mistake.

"Follow me, Liline," she said, carelessly, "I will show you madame's room; your sleeping-room will do later."

Liline followed in silence along the gallery; she felt herself very superior to Nathalie, and it was not necessary to tell her that she should not sleep at the château.

The woman stopped, opened an outer door, and then she knocked at the inner one. "Come in" was said, and Nathalie opened the inner door.

The walls of the room within looked very desolate. The paper hung so loosely, that in the corners it made festoons and ragged flags with its tatters. But the floor was covered with fine old tapestries, and some ancient white and gold sofas and arm-chairs, covered with painted satin, had been taken hastily out of their wrappings, and with two or threespindle-legged tables gave a quaint and refined character to the marquise's room. The bedstead was shrouded by curtains; but madame's own especial table and her desk had traveled with her from Paris. She sat bent over her writing, and her back was towards the door.

Nathalie did not speak. She let Liline wait her mistress' leisure, and she left the room.

The marquise looked round as the door closed, and then she rose and came forward, with a smile on her fair, high-nosed face.

"Dear child, is it you?"

She bent down and kissed Liline's forehead, and then while she looked at her, the smile beamed out of her blue eyes, and curved her thin lips into an admiring gaze.

"So, my child, you are as blooming as a Provence rose. I am glad to see you again. Sit down and tell me about your father."

The marquise was very tall, and she looked dignified as she placed herself in an easy-chair, and pointed to a stool near it.

It seemed to Liline, as she seated herself at the lady's feet, that Madame de Vougay had aged very much since she left her. Her forehead was still free from creases; but the network of fine lines at the corner of each eye had become criss-crossed like a spider's web.

"My father is quite well, madame, thank you," she said. She tried to feel quite at ease; but the repose of the lady's manners, and her quiet, refined way of speaking, awed the girl. She thought, if she could only behave like that—well, she would try, and then she should be a lady.

"It is good of him to spare you. Now I look at you, Liline, I wonder he could part with you so easily. It does one good to see anything so pretty as you are, my child. I have never really replaced you little one."

She patted the girl's rich hair as affectionately as if she were still the child she called her.

Liline blushed ; she hated the task her father had put on her. She felt so sure that what she had to say would annoy Madame de Vougay.

"If you please, madame, I am very sorry ; but my father says he cannot spare me altogether ; he wishes to fetch me home every evening."

She pouted, and tears of vexation rushed to her eyes, she could not look up.

"That will do very well, Liline. I like to be alone with my books in the evening, I shall not want you then. Tell your father I am content with his arrangement. Now let us get to work, my child. You can write at that table in the window, I will dictate as I sit here."

Liline was terribly disconcerted. In many ways she was prosaic ; but for all that she had some imagination, and since she received Madame de Vougay's note, it had been playing her sad tricks. It had even persuaded her that the marquise considered her a friend, and had asked her to the château for the sake of her companionship. And now this fancy was rudely dispelled. She saw Madame de Vougay lean back and close her eyes, a pose she so well remembered in those old days, and the feeling of *ennui* came back. She sighed as she placed herself at the table in the window, for she also remembered the weary hours she had passed, pen in hand, waiting for the effusions of the lady's muse. But she had been a child at that time ; things must be different now——"

"One's best ideas are sure to come when one has no power of registering them." Madame de Vougay kept her eyes closed while she spoke. "On the journey from Paris many beautiful lines flashed through my brain. I cannot recall one of them now. Let us hope that something else will come in place of them."

At the end of an hour, when Liline's feet tingled with keeping still, and she felt altogether restless and impatient, Madame de Vougay had dictated a composition which a careful reader of Lamartine would have said did credit to her memory rather than to her invention.

"Read it all over, child ; is it not lovely ? Does it not thrill you ?" she said.

"It is beautiful, madame." Liline could not understand the verses, but she felt sure they must be very fine.

"I am going to walk on the terrace now, my child."

Liline rose, wiped her pens and shut up the blotting-book on which she had been writing. She longed to stretch her arms and to gape ; but now at last she was going to enjoy herself. She should of course walk with the marquise, and it was possible in their talk that she might learn when Monsieur Lucien was coming to the château. After his return from England, when Liline had caught that brief glimpse of him, he had gone to St. Petersburg, but Liline had not heard any news of him for a long time.

"While I am out, you can make two copies of those verses."

Madame de Vougay had a very soft pleasant way

of speaking; she nodded at Liline and went to the door that opened into her dressing-room.

"When you have finished you will find Nathalie in here, and then she will give you something to eat—stay——"

She turned and came half way back.

"At present I am alone, Liline, but in a few days I may have a visitor or two, and, therefore, you had better keep to my apartments; Nathalie will let you have a little room close by for yourself. You understand that I do not wish you to be seen in the château by any one, my child; you come here for me only."

She went out without waiting for Liline's answer, and it was as well. The girl was very angry—she was more than angry, for she suddenly understood her position, the marquise wanted to use her like a machine. "Unkind old woman," she said to herself, "does she suppose that any one so young and so beautiful can do without pleasure, and what pleasure can I find in writing down her ridiculous verses."

Liline knew that the command that she should keep to one part of the château galled her far more than the monotonous occupation did. She had persuaded herself that at last her dream would come true—she should speak to Monsieur le Marquis. She rarely thought about her old friend Gustave; at the beginning of her life in Paris she had once boasted of her childish acquaintance with Monsieur Chauvin, and Nathalie had told her in a slighting way that Monsieur Gustave was only a poor relation, and that but for the marquise's kindness he would be a beggar.

After this snub Liline did not mention his name; and when she came back to Vougay, although she asked many questions about Monsieur le Marquis, she had not once inquired for his cousin. She had never suffered from poverty; but those two years in the Hôtel de Vougay had strengthened her determination to be as she said "a lady," and a lady in Liline's opinion must be rich and able to dress to perfection.

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, as she sat down to her writing again, "I see now why the marquise has me here—this is my prison. Monsieur Lucien will have no chance of finding me out even if he should go to the house in the wood."

There was a knock at the outer door.

"At least I may see what happens," she said, sulkily to herself; then she called out: "Come in."

Etienne, the steward, opened the door and came forward with so low a bow that he did not at first perceive his mistress' absence.

Liline saw that he carried a telegram on the little tray in his hand.

"Madame has just gone to her room," she said, "I will take the telegram to her."

The steward gave it, but he waited for any orders that it might occasion.

Liline knocked at Madame de Vougay's door, and being told to come in, she found the marquise sitting while Nathalie pinned a large Leghorn hat securely to her mistress' fair hair.

"Etienne has brought a telegram, madame," Liline said, "he waits for orders."

She looked hard at Madame de Vougay while she read the telegram, but there was no change on her pleasant face.

"There is no answer," she said. "You can tell Etienne to come to me on the terrace."

Liline went out and Nathalie closed the door behind her. When Etienne had gone, the girl did not, however, go back at once to her writing. She moved again to the door of the marquise's room, and, although she did not appear to be listening, she heard Madame de Vougay say :

"Oh, no—not the marquis—it is Monsieur Gustave ; but he will only stay a day or two."

CHAPTER V.

AN ARRIVAL.

MADAME DE VOUGAY was greatly impressed by Liline's beauty ; the girl's self possession, too, seemed wonderful, considering that she lived quite out of the world, alone with her father, who was, of course, only a rough soldier. She was altogether so attractive that she must certainly be kept out of the way of Lucien, should he visit the château.

"The best way will be to find a suitable husband for the girl," the lady thought, as she walked up and down the broad terrace, between rows of myrtles, and orange-trees in huge green and white tubs.

There were really no ordinary garden flowers at the château. A thicket of roses and honeysuckle clustered round a green-grey fountain, and long trailing periwinkles hid traces of walks ; here and there a tall spike of foxglove pierced its way out of the flowery jungle, which marked the spot where the garden had been. It lay at the south end of the terrace, and as she reached it the châtelaine's eyes rested longingly on the old grey fountain and its surroundings ; but for Lucien's debts she felt that the restoration of the garden might have been possible.

Gustave's telegram said that he was coming on Lucien's business. The poor mother's heart ached. She feared her son had got into some fresh trouble.

and yet, on his return from Russia, he had seemed to be completely sobered. In regard to Gustave, it was a little awkward that he should come to Vougay just as she had sent for Liline. Well, well; he need not see the girl. She must take care of that. But when she reached the other end of the terrace, Madame de Vougay smiled at her own precautions. Gustave was not like her son, Lucien. Gustave she thought had a cold, well-regulated nature; he was bent on advancing himself in his profession; there was no fear that he would entangle himself with a pretty village girl. But then Liline Vivier was not like an ordinary village girl. Madame de Vougay disliked any sort of worry; and now she shook herself free from this one by reflecting on Gustave's high moral tone.

"Lucien calls him a saint," she said, lightly; "there can be no danger for Liline in such a man as Gustave Chauvin, she can gain only good from him if they should meet."

A sudden idea flushed the marquise's pale face. What a subject for her poetic powers would be this idyl of a well-born youth and a village maiden exchanging their first love sighs! They were both too virtuous and well brought up to do more than sigh over their love. Gustave was far too honorable to think of wronging Liline, and certainly he would never dream of marrying her; it would be just a brief episode in two young lives.

"Setting aside his own wish to rise in the world," she thought, complacently, "he would never outrage his family by a *mésalliance*. No, he may be trusted

if he should meet with this lovely child. Ah, yes; it would make a charming little episode in both their lives. I will leave chance to settle it, and I will not speak of Liline to Gustave."

Liline found the afternoon's dictation less irksome. In the long pauses she had time to wonder what Gustave Chauvin would think of her.

Baptiste came at six o'clock to fetch his daughter, and as they walked home together, he was much surprised by her silence. He had expected to find her full of gaiety—excited even by the pleasure of meeting with Madame de Vougay; but he did not question the girl; he was so happy to have his darling once more beside him, that he was content to walk on with her in silence, wondering, as he often did in his humble way, how it had come to pass that so rough a fellow as he was father to such a dainty bit of loveliness.

"Are you to go again to-morrow, sweetheart?" he said at last, when they were clear of the château, and were making their way across an unfrequented part of the park.

Liline was thinking about Gustave Chauvin. She roused when her father spoke; she did not intend to let him guess how disappointed she had been with her benefactress.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I was thinking. Yes, I am to go to-morrow, and every day I fancy."

She wondered whether her father knew that Monsieur Chauvin was expected, and she decided to give him her own version. If he heard the story from any one else, he might take it into his head to keep her

away from the château during the young man's visit. Liline knew that she had power over her father; but she did not love him well enough to trust him; her sole trust lay in herself.

"Did you hear that Monsieur Chauvin is coming?" she said; "perhaps you did not know him, father." She looked up at Baptiste with so innocent an expression, that it would have been impossible to doubt her simplicity.

"No, child."

"When mother and I lived here, he was a big, ugly boy, and he used to come to see us."

She laughed merrily.

Baptiste looked hard at her; but she did not flinch; and, indeed, when she thought of those old days, she was greatly amused at the remembrance; it seemed absurd that so big a lad had been able to find pleasure in talking to such a baby as she was.

"Did you like this Monsieur Gustave?" Baptiste's voice was ill-assured. He had felt a sudden jealousy, and he was half ashamed of his question.

"You see, he was my only playfellow." Liline laughed. "I used to tease him, for he was slow and stupid, and he was shy. Oh, depend upon it, father, he is quite another sort of man from Monsieur le Marquis."

Baptiste was troubled by her flippant manner. "What do you know about Monsieur le Marquis?" he said, sharply.

"I—I never spoke to him; but I know he *is* handsome, and everybody likes him, and he is the master of Vougay. It will be a grand day for all of us, will

it not, when he marries, and brings a young mistress to the château."

"Diable!" Baptiste raised his rugged eyebrows. "Are you not content with your old mistress, my jewel? Why do you wish to see her set aside?"

Liline shook her head.

"She will not stay here, father. When I asked why madame's bed-room was not repaired, and made more suitable, Nathalie said, 'That is Monsieur Lucien's affair. Madame has a house of her own near the Lake of Geneva.'"

The old soldier bent his head.

"Poor lady," he said, "people of her class must find France sadly changed; but on her own land, among her own people here in Brittany they are not Republicans, they still believe in the lilies of France. Ah, why does she not trust her people?"

Liline was thinking of the poetic lamentation which had been dictated to her in the course of the afternoon.

"I do not know," she said; "but I am sure madame is troubled——"

She broke off—her father's eyes were bent on the ground—but Liline heard footsteps, and she saw a man's figure moving among the chestnuts near the cottage. She felt sure that it was a stranger, for no one but a stranger was likely to take this wild way to the château. More than once her father had been forced to cut her an opening through the luxuriant briar arms that now and then formed a barrier, and threatened destruction to her gown. The stranger might perhaps be Monsieur Chauvin himself—if so,

he might possibly have gone round to the cottage to see his old playfellow before he presented himself at the château.

Liline's interest in Gustave had been faint. She had only thought of him as a conquest better worth making in the future than the stolid-faced, huge-collared, wooden-shod young farmers, who loitered outside the church, and gazed at her so longingly, yet so sheepishly, every Sunday when she passed in and out of the porch. If this was Monsieur Chauvin, and he had gone out of his way to look for her, things were altogether different from what she had supposed them. Her heart beat quickly as she remembered that her boy-lover had always called her his little wife.

Baptiste looked up—his ear had also caught the sound of footsteps—almost as soon as Liline heard them. The man advancing towards them in the mingled light and shade of the chestnut boughs was still on the pasture side of the park.

"It is a stranger," Baptiste stopped. "You had better stay here, Liline, I will go forward and see who he is."

She pouted and felt rebellious, but she obeyed. Her natural coolness helped her against her angry self-will. If Gustave Chauvin had gone to the cottage in the wood, he had gone to see her, and, therefore, he must be able to guess who she was, while she stood waiting for her father to come back. She knew how becoming her little straw hat was, and she moved a few steps aside so that the fast fading light might fall on her and make her more conspicuous.

She saw her father pull off his hat as the stranger spoke to him, and she knew that she had guessed rightly. But why did they not at once come to her as she stood waiting. Her pretty rose-leaf color deepened—she hoped her father had not disgusted Monsieur Chauvin by any unnecessary show of humility. Monsieur Gustave was a gentleman by birth; but he was not master of Vougay or of her father either, and in these Republican days, the girl thought a great show of deference was old-fashioned and ignorant.

What was this? The stranger was nodding familiarly to her father, and now he was going straight for the château turning into a path to which Baptiste pointed as they parted. It was too bad, too altogether tyrannical to be borne. Liline's small hands clenched involuntarily, and tears of mortified vanity filled her eyes.

"Father will make me hate him," she said, angrily; "he has let Monsieur Gustave go on without so much as asking him to come and speak to me—one would think I was still a baby."

When Baptiste came back she kept silence. She saw that he looked at her anxiously, but she was not going to take him into her confidence; if she betrayed her vexation he might take it into his head that she cared for Monsieur Gustave.

Liline affected to despise the marquise's *femme de chambre*; she tried to treat Nathalie as an inferior, but she had insensibly adopted many of her opinions; one of them had taken firm possession of the girl; she told herself that men, especially middle-aged men,

were blunderers and thick-witted, and that such men were in every way, except mere personal strength, inferior to women.

"That was Monsieur Chauvin," her father said. "I showed him the direct path to the château. He has been to St. Pol, and has walked on here from Bodilis."

"That is a long walk, is it not?" she spoke carelessly, but she was a little shaken in her self-confidence. If Monsieur Gustave was coming from Bodilis instead of coming as she had expected from Morlaix, he would naturally be on that side of the park; he might not have thought about the house in the wood.

Her father did not answer; he was troubled by Monsieur Chauvin's arrival. He had hoped to keep Liline out of the way of gentlemen till she was safely married to a man in her own station. If she got notice and admiration from gentlemen, her head would be turned. It was his duty Baptiste argued to shield her from that temptation. He had always heard that poor cousins, belonging to great houses, like Monsieur Gustave, were undesirable acquaintances. They had nothing of their own, and they would take all they could get. Baptiste had met with more than one of these hangers-on in the army, "full of poor pride" as he called it. He said no more about Monsieur Chauvin this evening, and Liline's willingness to talk of other things satisfied her father that she had no curiosity about the young fellow.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD PLAY-FELLOWS.

LILINE smiled, while she poured out her father's coffee, and ate her own breakfast. She went to the door with him and kissed his cheek before he started on his daily tramp through the woods and meadows of Vougay. She watched him out of sight, and then she drew a deep breath of relief. Marie Jeanne was in the kitchen rubbing the brass hinges and fittings of a large wardrobe there; and Liline departed to her own little room to think out the day before her.

With all her cleverness, she was puzzled by her father's silence. It might have been reticence she thought, then again Monsieur Gustave might have said nothing—in that case her father had nothing to tell her. It was the fear of this that had kept her from asking if Monsieur Chauvin had spoken about her. It would have been so mortifying to hear from her father that her child lover had forgotten her.

She set off earlier to-day for the château. She took beforehand a long look in her little mirror. She went by the short way her father had brought her home last night.

"It is newer and altogether pleasanter," she said, and then she laughed softly, as if some other agreeable thought had suggested itself.

There was a curious contradiction in Liline's nature.

Whatever she wished for she tried to obtain. She would never yield a fraction of the coveted object ; but she usually took an indirect and subtle way towards its attainment. She even tried to hide from herself the real tendency of her actions and words. To-day she would not say simply to herself: "Monsieur Gustave will seek me where he saw me last night," and yet she laughed as she thought how pleasant the sight of him would be between the still leafy chestnut boughs.

At that moment, however, Gustave Chauvin was standing beside his benefactress' writing-table. He called Madame de Vougay aunt, although there was no real kinship between them.

The marquise's fair, usually placid face was puckered with trouble ; but the creases smoothed a little while she listened to her young adviser, who stood with bent head on the opposite side of the table. He was tall and broad-shouldered ; but he had no spare flesh about him. One could see his legs and arms were thin ; his hands, too, were slender and nervous, and there were hollows in his cheeks ; but these seemed to match so well with his dark, deeply-sunk eyes, that they only made a natural feature in his thoughtful face. His hair was beautiful, deep brown in color, it crossed his broad forehead in sculpturesque waves full of light and shade. Gustave Chauvin was, perhaps, not handsome ; but he was far less plain than he had been as a boy. The irresolute look had left his face ; it was, indeed, full of power, and yet, the expression on it just now was so sweet that Madame de Vougay found rest for her anxiety while she looked at him.

"You deprecate my plan, then," she said.

"Pardon me, I only try to show you its drawbacks ; but I am not sure that you ought to listen to such a hermit as I am, dear madame : I know nothing of society or of the world in that sense, and no doubt my ideas about marriage are rural and romantic."

"I am afraid so," she sighed, "but, Gustave, I fancy Lucien may make a good husband even though he does take a wife to—to——"

"To pay his debts," Gustave laughed, "I hope so. I believe good women are so good that when they love they will excuse all sorts of errors in the man they love. My fear is that it may be difficult to get Lucien to consent ; and even if he does this, will he take the trouble to win a wife."

Madame de Vougay sat up rather stiffly.

"I fancy he need not take much trouble about that, Gustave."

The young man bowed. It was only about the second time in his life that the marquise had made him feel he was not her son, and it increased the dislike he had for some time felt for his cousin Lucien's conduct. There was little sympathy between the young men ; but Lucien always behaved to his cousin with kindness in which Gustave's sensitiveness fancied there was a good deal of pity. In their boyhood they had been schoolfellows, and Gustave had often helped to shield Lucien from the consequences of his follies ; but since his cousin's return from Russia, Gustave had avoided him as much as possible. He knew that, in spite of all the sacrifices made by his mother, Lucien was deeply in debt, and yet his extravagances seemed worse than ever.

At last a crisis had come, and Lucien's man of business had told him he must find some way of paying his debts, and Lucien had gone to his cousin, who was in Paris, and had asked him to break the bad news to the marquise.

"Yes," she said, when she found that Gustave did not answer. "My old friend, Madame de Lanneur, will be charmed with the idea; indeed, we talked of it when the children were young. Lucien is now six-and-twenty, and Adelaïde is seventeen; her fortune is even now very large—it will be enormous—she will be a sweet rose-bud of a daughter, and I shall devote myself to her happiness."

Gustave turned away to one of the windows, these were set so high up that from the middle of the room the park could not be seen. He knew that his face was not in sympathy with this marriage project; and he could hardly keep from sighing at the idea of this innocent child of seventeen sacrificed to the selfish profligate he felt sure his cousin was. Just now, in his extreme indignation at the sorrow and vexation which Lucien had brought into his mother's life, Gustave thought very hardly of him.

"You are anxious to explore your old haunts, I see," Madame de Vougay said. "I too shall be engaged presently, so I bid you *au revoir*."

Last night, on arriving, Gustave had passed near the house in the wood, and he had seen that it was inhabited; but when he met the garde, and asked the nearest way to the château, Baptiste had not made himself known to Monsieur Chauvin, and Gustave had not guessed that the female figure half hidden by the trees was Liline.

When he reached the château and told his aunt of Lucien's difficulties, Madame de Vougay's distress had completely absorbed Gustave, and he had lain awake planning how best she could be spared vexation. No one who saw the calm, self-controlled face with which he met her in the morning, could have guessed the deep and active sympathy he felt. He had not had time to remember Liline Vivier.

It was a great relief to find himself out in the fresh pure air, with the thick, soft grass underfoot and the fading leaves overhead. Where he now was, the park had become a forest, with leaves above and brambles and underwood crossing his path.

"The wood has surely grown very much thicker in ten years," he thought. Étienne, the steward, in answer to his inquiries about his old playfellow, had told him of Liline's return to Château Vougay, he said that Liline Vivier lived at the house in the wood with her father; but the news did not suggest to Gustave that he had seen the father and daughter overnight.

He laughed to himself as he recalled his former liking for Liline.

He went on among the trees, thinking of Lucien's marriage. He could not picture Lucien as a husband, and on the whole he pitied him. Even at six-and-twenty, Gustave thought it was very hard for a man to give up his liberty—as he had told his aunt, his ideas of marriage were romantic. If he took a wife he should feel bound to live for her and to try to make her happy; and he could not believe that a woman could be half so good a friend as a man could,

Gustave knew a few men who dearly loved him, and whose lives he had helped to steer by his sensible example ; but hitherto he had not found the ideal friend he longed for. His most intimate acquaintance so far was a woman, Madame de Vougay, his so-called aunt ; but he dared not let her see all his ideas, they would only have puzzled or troubled her.

By the time he was forty, Gustave thought he might be able to marry, and then—— Well, he should find some one much younger than he was, and with whom he should be perfectly content. Certainly he should not take a wife for any other reason than because he liked her.

Here his thoughts were interrupted ; he caught his foot in a tangle of bramble, and if he had not adroitly flung himself back, he must have fallen.

While he stood freeing himself, he saw a pale glimmer among the tree trunks some way before him. He looked attentively, and he made out that it must be the skirt of a woman's gown that now showed, like a pale glory, beyond the grey tree trunks.

It suddenly flashed upon him that it was perhaps Liline ; the woman, whoever she was, stood still. Gustave plunged forward, and he saw her. Only her gown was in light ; the shadow of a round straw hat fell deeply over her eyes and the upper part of her face ; but it did not reach the bright lips, parted in expectation. But neither light nor shade could add to the grace of Liline's attitude as she stood under a tree, her pretty head bent a little forward as she listened to the coming footsteps.

Gustave's pale face flushed as he reached her. He

had thought easily of renewing his old acquaintance with the forest guard's daughter ; but now the sight of so much beauty flattered him, he was stirred out of his usual calm, almost unwilling to speak.

He pulled off his hat and Liline bowed. She had seen him coming for several minutes, and she was not as much disturbed as he was, though it was a new and altogether delightful experience to find herself face to face and alone with a gentleman. She felt a thrill of excitement.

"You are Liline Vivier, are you not?" Gustave said. "Ah, you have forgotten your old playfellow—I am Gustave Chauvin, now do you remember me?"

It jarred him to see this refined-looking creature droop her eyes with a commonplace simper. He did not know how disconcerting his own eyes were—how very plainly they told her his admiration.

"Yes, I remember you, monsieur," the lovely pink of her cheeks deepened, and she spoke softly and shyly.

"It must not be monsieur and mademoiselle between us, Liline," then he hesitated. How could he dictate to this beautiful creature, who for aught he knew had admirers in plenty, and who very likely cared nothing about seeing him again. "I mean," he went on, "that I hope we are going to be friends, and that you will allow me the privileges of a very old acquaintance."

She looked up ; her eyes were so full of arch amusement that he laughed. Liline joined him, and they stood laughing merrily over their childish

memories for a minute or two. Then she stole a look at him which gave him courage—there was such evident satisfaction in her golden brown eyes.

"Which way are you going?" he said presently. "I will walk with you if I may."

She laughed again; then she looked grave.

"I am going to the château. At present I am madame's secretary; but," she glanced archly at him, "I have orders to keep out of the way of visitors."

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed; but he placed himself beside her, and began to walk in the direction of the château.

"I am not a visitor, Liline, I am only here on business."

She shook her head.

"Well," he went on, "I will leave you before we come in sight of the château, will that satisfy you? Do you go there every day?"

She nodded and smiled at him. She enjoyed his admiration so much that she did not care to disturb it by words, and they walked some way in silence—his eyes fixed on her lovely face; but her eyes drooped again. She was evidently pleased, he thought, to have him beside her, and she was looking more beautiful in this moment of triumph than she had ever looked before.

There was a good deal of natural pleasure in Liline's feelings. It was so nice, she thought, that Monsieur Chauvin had not forgotten those old days, and she felt really glad and happy to see him again.

"Had you not forgotten me?" she said at last. The smile she gave him delighted Gustave. He had

never seen so lovely a creature, and he felt the power of her fascination, a power which every moment he was teaching her to realize.

Just then she gave him another glance, half arch, half coy. It utterly bewildered him.

"How could I forget your?" he said.

"Did you guess who I was just now," she said. "You could not have recognized me. Why, it is ten years since I saw you."

"Ah! I wonder how it was I knew you," he smiled at her with delight. "You are not the same, you know; the pretty child has changed into a charming girl, and yet even now I see the sweet child Liline looking out at your eyes at me."

His cheeks glowed, and Liline blushed at his warm praise.

"I used to be a very naughty child. I am afraid I feel ashamed of those days."

She looked up, her eyes full of sweet humility, as if she wished to ask his forgiveness for the childish wrongs she had done him.

Gustave felt like a boy again—he seemed transformed—but, as he looked round, he saw they had reached the edge of the wood, and he stopped still.

"I will leave you here. I am going to see Monsieur Édouin," he said. "I suppose there is no change at the Presbytery."

Liline's smile faded.

"Yes," she said, "you will find one great change. There is a new housekeeper—dear old Marguérite is dead—the new one is called Françoise, and she is *dévoté*. Ah, mon Dieu!" she clasped her hands and

turned up her eyes, "she is stiff as a stick—she likes to lecture me. She is not to be compared to dear, old, kind Marguérite. Do you remember the bon-bons she used to give us?"

"Yes."

He could not contradict Liline when she looked up at him in that way; but it seemed to Gustave that the old housekeeper was not to be regretted. She had been in his opinion, with all her kindness, a chattering and slovenly old woman. He held out his hand and held Liline's while he spoke. "I shall not say good-bye. I shall meet you on your way home, sweet friend. What time do you leave?"

She looked grave, almost sad, he thought. "My father is coming to fetch me," she said. "That was my father you met last night. I was close by under the trees, but you had no eyes for me, then," she said, teasingly.

"Forgive me. Was that your father? Well, I must try to improve my acquaintance with him. But you were not with him. Ah, naughty girl, you know, if you had been there, I must have seen you. *Au revoir.*"

They parted, and Liline began to cross the open part of the park towards the château. Instead of going on to the village, Gustave hid himself behind a tree, so that he could watch her unobserved.

His aunt's troubles and Lucien's proposed marriage were forgotten. Gustave had entered into that rose-colored country, which many people traverse; but which some among them have learned to call Mirage.

CHAPTER VII.

A PROPOSAL.

GUSTAVE stood waiting under the chestnut-tree where he had first met Liline. The young fellow had changed, in this short week, as much as the boughs overhead had changed ; but while they had lost—for the fierce autumn wind had stripped away the withered leaves, and had left only a few green ones, that drooped timidly, as if ashamed of their loneliness—Gustave Chauvin seemed to have more of spring joy in him than of autumn pensiveness. He looked full of health, and life, and happiness.

In his outlook on life, during those solitary years when he had only himself to commune with, Gustave had decided that most of a man's day-dreams must prove fallacious, must be regarded as the mere pastime of youth, and that their fulfillment could not be looked for. And so of late he had yielded up the hope, fondly cherished in boyhood, of coming back to Vougay, and claiming Liline for his wife. More than once the marquise had asked him to take rest and change in the old place ; but at that time he had refused the kindly-meant offer. He did not then know where Liline was to be found, but he had determined not to risk the chance of seeing her again till he could fulfill his promise.

But this hope, too, had taken its place among his

day-dreams. Gustave's ideal of life had risen ; his horizon had mounted with his success, and he felt that some years must pass before he could establish himself in such a home as he now wished for. And Liline was perhaps already married ; certainly, if she had grown up according to her childish promise of beauty, she would marry long before he could lay claim to her.

He had been hurried down to Vougay on Lucien's business, and without any purpose of seeking Liline Vivier ; it must even be confessed that, on the morning after his arrival when he questioned Étienne as to what had become of her, he learned, with almost a shock, that she was living in the house in the wood with her father.

Gustave knew nothing about the changes that had meanwhile happened, and it seemed to him sad that so beautiful and refined a creature as the Liline he had fondly dreamed about should have been left to grow up in this sort of savage solitude. She could only be a mere peasant he thought.

Étienne, however, asked Monsieur Chauvin if he had not seen the girl while she lived in Paris with the marquise. And at this news Gustave had received a fresh shock. Liline, he thought, would have grown up more safely in the woods than in such a city as Paris.

But the sight of her had effaced all doubts and fears. Gustave Chauvin, who usually considered all sides of a subject before he allowed himself to form an opinion thereon, had yielded himself up *unresistingly to the sweet magic of Liline's beauty*. He told

himself, the first day, that he was delighted to find his old playfellow just as he had expected to find her; and since then he had given up any reflection on his feelings—he had simply lived in them.

He now met Liline every morning on her way to the château; and more than once in the evening she had left off writing and left the château rather earlier so as to get a few minutes with him before her father joined her.

Gustave shrank from meeting Baptiste; he had gone to see the garde, and he had not met with an encouraging welcome. This, however, did not surprise the young fellow, and he respected Baptiste for his coldness towards him; it showed him that the girl had a careful guardian.

Gustave was, as he had told Madame de Vougay, eccentric and romantic in his idea of marriage; he wished to have a wife who would love him for himself, and his old determination to win Liline had become stronger than ever. But, day by day as they met, Gustave found it more difficult to approach the subject of love. Liline was so gay, so playful in her talk, that he shrank from speaking earnestly lest he should weary the bright butterfly-like maiden. He must be patient, he thought, and the opportunity would come; but he resolved not to leave Château Vougay without winning her consent to become his wife.

It seemed to him that it would be unwise to let Baptiste suspect his intentions, the garde would be sure in some way or other to warn his daughter, and Gustave was anxious to prevent a quarrel between

Liline and her father. It was not wonderful, he thought, that the sweet girl shrank a little from Baptiste; he was so rough, and so blunt—a good, honest fellow, doubtless, but not a suitable companion for such a precious creature as Liline. Gustave determined not to speak of his love, either to the marquise or to Baptiste, until Liline had promised to be his wife.

But all this prudence and patience had to-day been upset. In their place was only a burning impatience that tortured him as he stood waiting under the tree for Liline. She was much later than usual; it was growing dark, and every moment he expected to hear Baptiste's heavy, crunching tread over the fallen leaves and twigs.

The post only reached Vougay at midday, and it had brought news that Lucien might be expected any day at the château. The marquis wrote that he accepted his mother's proposal, and was willing to accompany her to Château Plouanic. It was this news that had so excited Gustave. He resolved to betroth himself to Liline before Lucien's arrival. Lucien would respect his cousin's promised wife, but Gustave felt that Liline would not be safe from his cousin if he regarded her only as Baptiste Vivier's daughter. Even Lucien's own approaching marriage would not prevent his free admiration of Liline's singular beauty. As Gustave pondered all this, it seemed to him a special Providence that had brought Baptiste back to claim his daughter from the marquise while Lucien was absent from Paris.

At last he saw her light dress in the dim distance.

He went a little way to meet her, but he did not venture far beyond the shelter of the trees. For Liline's sake it was better that his meetings with her should remain a secret.

"You are late, sweetheart," he said, tenderly, as she came up to him. The new tone in his voice struck Liline; she gave him an inquiring look.

"Your aunt had to write letters," she said, "and she could not dictate so early as usual. Ah, I am so weary of it, my fingers ache."

She let him take her ungloved hand and press it in his. Suddenly he kissed it—the touch of his burning lips startled her. She drew her hand away.

"You may not do that," she said, "it is not permitted." She drew up her slight figure till she looked as dignified as the marquise herself.

Gustave bent over her.

"Pardon me, but you will permit it," he whispered, "every thing is permitted to a husband; and you will be my wife, will you not, dearest child? Liline, you know how I love you—love is no word to express the feelings I have for you."

She looked at him in wondering silence; then under his glowing eyes she blushed and hung her head.

But Gustave did not want words; it was enough for him that she suffered him to take her hand and kiss it as passionately as he pleased, while he poured out the story of his love and his hopes cherished since he had parted from her in boyhood. He paused at last, and Liline gently drew her hand away.

She looked up at him and shook her head, and he saw tears in her eyes.

"You go too fast," she said, sadly, "Ah, you will never get the marquise to consent, or my father either, and you cannot marry me without, your prospects would be ruined, and you would not find a priest who would do it."

"I have only two years to wait," he spoke in a strong, hopeful voice; but Liline gave a heavy sigh.

His proposal had seemed at first to offer a joyful escape from the life she hated, and she had been ready to consent. Now a cloud fell over her fair face.

"Two years is a long time," she said, thoughtfully.

He tried to regain possession of her hand, but she drew back. Her mood had changed.

"My darling, I will be frank with you;" the fondness in his voice touched her. "I will be entirely frank with you. If I married you now we should have to live in two rooms, and I could not afford you the comforts or the pleasures that every loving husband likes his wife to enjoy. But in two years, or it may be sooner, I shall obtain a post which will double my income, and which will open out to me sources of profit which at present I do not possess. I believe that your father would give you to me then. Will you wait for me, Liline? Will you say 'Gustave, I will be your wife?'"

Her face had cleared a good deal while she listened, and when she looked at him again she was dry-eyed—still there was some trouble left in her face.

"Say yes, my darling," he said, and in spite of her unwillingness he caught her hand.

"Hark!" She raised her free hand, and Gustave heard Baptiste's footsteps.

"Your father. Well, let him come," he said, boldly, with a glad look in his eyes.

His fearlessness impressed her. She thought he was almost handsome; still she had to be prudent for them both.

"Dear Gustave," she put up her lips so caressingly that he could hardly keep from kissing her, "go, now, for my sake; I will make all right with my father. Till to-morrow——" She kissed her fingers to him, and he disappeared among the trees.

Then Liline went on to meet her father. Even in the dim light under the trees she could see how suspicious he looked. She slipped her hand under his arm and smiled in his face, but he did not smile back at her.

"Did not I hear voices?" he said, gruffly.

Liline stooped to free her skirt from a briar arm.

"I expect you did, I heard voices somewhere in the wood." She darted a swift glance at him as she rose, and she thought he looked troubled. He did not speak again till they reached the house in the wood, then he stood still before he opened the door.

"There is news to-day at the château. Have you heard it, child?"

Liline was startled, it seemed so strange that Gustave should not have told her.

"I have heard no news, father."

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders.

"Your mistress does not then put much confidence in you, child. Monsieur le Marquis is coming to Vougay; he may come any day."

Liline frowned at the word "mistress," but at the news itself, she flushed deeply, her spirits rose, she thrilled with joy. At last—at last, the great desire of her heart was to be accomplished; she was going to see the marquis again, and he would see her. Liline's head seemed to spin and her heart to stand still, in this ecstasy of anticipation. Ten minutes ago she had felt fond of Gustave Chauvin, and if he could have taken her at once from this hateful solitude, she would gladly have married him. Now, almost her first thought was one of self-gratulation that she had not promised herself to her old playfellow.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISMISSED.

IN some ways Liline was like her father. She had inherited, for instance, Baptiste's quiet power of observation; she was less suspicious than he was, but at the same time she had quicker perception.

Baptiste doubted Monsieur Chauvin, and distrusted him; Liline believed fully in her lover's honesty of purpose, while she doubted his power to succeed in life. To be a gentleman and yet to live in two rooms, was a revelation that overpowered her with surprise. She longed to be a lady, it would give her keen pleasure to be able to treat Nathalie as her inferior; in all ways Liline was a practical young woman.

"There would be no use in calling myself a lady," she thought, "unless I was one really, and if I had to dress poorly and always go on foot, no one could tell the difference between me and Nathalie."

She went further than this. That night, while she brushed out her rich auburn hair till it hung like a gleaming cloak round her shoulders even in the poor light cast by the little lamp on her table, Liline mused over Gustave's proposal. At first it had seemed to take away her breath, that a man of his class should be willing to step down to her level, and then she remembered that things were greatly altered in France.

She liked him, oh yes, she liked him very much—her cheeks glowed warmly at the remembrance of his looks and his kisses—and she looked at her pretty hand with pride, for no one but Gustave had ever kissed it. But then when she belonged to him and could see him every day, should she care for him so much. She had listened attentively to all he said, but he had not said she should ever be rich; he had promised her comforts and some amusements; but Liline in her visions of ladyhood, had seen jewels and beautiful dresses and a carriage. She wanted to be uplifted—lifted high above her present condition, visibly—undoubtedly, to all eyes, “a lady.” It would be a poor satisfaction only to feel that she had married a gentleman if she herself had to live as quietly as any mere work-woman did.

Into these musings came the recollection of her father’s news about the young marquis’ coming. How pleased he had seemed; it was plain that he thought more highly of Monsieur Lucien than he did of Monsieur Chauvin.

The girl dreamed all night of the young lord.

She loitered over her breakfast, and kept her father chatting in the doorway.

At last he said :

“Good-bye, little one, I must go; you are making me play truant.” He, too, was in a cheerful mood.

“We shall have our young lord round during his stay,” he said, “so tell Marie Jeanne she had best be extra neat in her ways.”

Liline’s eyes sparkled. She had already decided *she would not* meet Gustave this morning in the

wood. She determined now to go to the château by the beaten track she had followed on the first morning, and to enter by the great gates. She had ever since gone by the path through the wood, and in by a small gate in the low grey wall that divided the château and courts from the park. Nathalie had given her the key of a door at the foot of the winding staircase, so that she might come and go, without giving trouble to any one. This seeming trust on the part of Nathalie had lulled the girl's doubts of her to sleep—in fact, she had scarcely seen the woman since the first day.

Once or twice Nathalie had come in to the marquise for instructions; but as Liline always wrote at the table near the window, she had not turned her head. If she thought of Nathalie at all, it was with a feeling of relief that she did not see her, for she could not forget how spitefully the woman had watched her in Paris. Nathalie's jealousy had made Liline regard the Hôtel de Vougay as a sort of prison, of which this dark-faced woman was jailor.

To-day, as the girl crossed the court, her thoughts were full of the young lord. If she had fascinated Gustave, she asked herself why should she not also fascinate Lucien, and then who could say what might happen. There was the Baron of Pourcel—Marie Jeanne had told her about his wife. Her father was a rich man in Paris, but no one knew from whence he came. Marie Jeanne said that this father had been a great money-lender, and that the new baroness was not a lady at all before she married the Baron of Pourcel.

"I, at least, look like a lady," Liline thought, proudly; "any one can see the difference between me and a village girl. Well, we shall see." Her spirits seemed to dance with anticipation.

The old mastiff did not rise up and come to meet her—he lay in the sunshine and growled as she passed by. Étienne was not visible, and she crossed the great hall and passed into the passage behind it without meeting a soul.

Nathalie stood waiting for her at the end of the passage. There was a strange look in the woman's face. Liline shivered without knowing why, she felt as if she had received a shock as she met Nathalie's eyes looking at her through their long, half-closed lids.

"I want a word with you, child," the woman said, familiarly; and, in Liline's present mood, her manner seemed insolent.

"Well, what do you want?" The girl looked scornful.

Nathalie laughed.

"You seem inclined to cast off old friends, Liline, because you have got a new one. You are foolish in every way; because the trees grow thickly, do you fancy no one sees through their branches, and do you also think that what a young man promises he is sure to perform? I say to you—take care."

She moved away and retreated into her mistress' room before the astonished girl could answer.

Liline was greatly disturbed. It was not the warning that affected her so much as the shock of *finding that her movements were spied on*. She

wondered whether Madame de Vougay had set Nathalie to watch her. The suspicion made her tap at the door louder than it usually was.

She found her patroness leaning back in an easy-chair. She was dressed in a loose cream-colored silk wrapper, which suited well with her faded complexion and her blue eyes. Madame de Vougay usually nodded and smiled at Liline when she came in ; this morning she held out her hand, and as the girl bent respectfully over the delicate ivory-hued fingers, she patted Liline's sunny hair.

"How fresh and bright you look, dear child ; you have brought in sunshine with you this chilly morning."

She looked so friendly, so full of kindness, that Liline felt ashamed of her suspicions. It was Nathalie's own malice she decided that had tracked her and watched her meetings with Gustave.

The girl smiled as she sat down to her writing ; she saw how unwise it was to feel annoyed by Nathalie's behavior. Let her do her worst, she could not harm her ; if she became Gustave's wife, the woman would be obliged to call her "madame." Ah, that would change everything. Instead of that touch of Madame la Marquise's fingers, or one of those rare kisses she had received, each time she met Madame de Vougay she should be received as an equal, a cousin, and kissed on both cheeks.

The cheeks burned with pride, and these thoughts helped her through an hour of waiting, during which she had to write down a line or two at rare intervals but when the second hour began, Liline became

weary and discontented. Her marriage with Gustave looked once more as grey and as uninviting as it had appeared to her last night, and her under-lip drooped fretfully. Why should she pledge herself to him, and thus yield up any chance of better prospects? There was no need of haste if he wanted her to wait two years. If she could only be seen, she was sure she could marry well. Suppose she did marry Gustave, and then found out that she could have had a rich, and, perhaps, a grand husband.

"Gustave looks grand," she said, "but that does not make him so; it is the thing itself that I care for."

At midday, instead of going out to walk on the terrace, Madame de Vougay came up to her secretary.

"After this morning, dear child, I shall not require you. We must say 'good-bye,'" and she patted Liline's shoulder kindly. "You have been very useful to me, Liline, and you must take this as a token of my appreciation of your services." She placed a little purse on the writing-table. "I had thought of giving you a dress or two; but it seems to me that you can have so little occasion for dress here that money is more useful."

Lilene felt choked, the humiliation was intolerable; it seemed to her that she was being sent away in disgrace, because Nathalie had told tales of her.

"Madame," she raised her head, and forced herself to speak quietly, although her anger strove to get free, "pardon me, but I cannot take money from you. I have been so glad to help you for love, dear lady. Will you not do me the honor of accepting my poor services?"

Madame de Vougay looked grave. She could not find fault with the girl's manner; but it disappointed her to find Liline so wanting in tact. She instinctively blamed herself for having spoiled the girl, so that she had forgotten her real position.

"I think you are unwise," she said, coldly; "if you do not need the money now, you can put it away, or it may be useful to your father."

Liline's anger had got loose now; it flashed into her eyes.

"Thank you, madame," she said, "if I have really been useful, you will not wish to give me pain—a ribbon that you have worn, or a book that you have read will be treasured by me; but I cannot take money for such a slight service as I have rendered."

Madame de Vougay was surprised, and she was also ruffled by this resistance, at the same time, Liline's last speech had touched her. She looked round her. A beautifully-bound volume of "Hours," with a gold clasp, lay on a table in the corner of the room.

She crossed the room, looked lovingly at the book and then came back and put it into Liline's hand.

"I give you a very dear companion of mine," she said; "it is more suitable to you than one of my trinkets would be, and it will serve to remind you sometimes of me. Good-bye, Liline."

She held out her hand, but she did not offer to kiss the girl.

"Thank you, madame, a hundred times."

Liline was still passionately angry, for she thought the marquise would have given her the little brooch

she wore at her throat. She lingered a moment, and then said :

"Are you sending me away, madame, for any fault?"

Madame de Vougay raised her eyebrows.

"You should try not to be fanciful," she said, gravely. "I told you I wanted your help while I was alone. I am expecting a visitor, and, therefore, I shall be occupied. Good-morning, child."

She walked away, feeling vexed with herself for having given so much explanation. She began to see that Nathalie was right. She had thought the woman jealous when she warned her mistress that Liline was spoiled and vain. Madame de Vougay felt that it was her own fault; she ought to have remembered that the terrible republican spirit which had infected the whole nation, made it more than ever incumbent on nobles to maintain class distinctions in their immediate surroundings. Liline was beautiful, and she had a singular power of fascination; she had, too, little dainty ways, which made her far more companionable than a servant could be. Every one of these qualities, however, made her dangerous when she presumed on them.

"Heavens!" The lady closed the door behind her. "Suppose I had let her come here during Lucien's visit!"

She uttered a thankful ejaculation for such an escape; and she determined to send the rejected purse of money to Baptiste Vivier, to be applied by him to his daughter's benefit.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARQUIS.

THE days were shortening, and although the dinner-hour was early at Château Vougay, the long, bare dining-room had to be lighted before the meal began.

Dinner was over now. The marquise had gone to her room, and soft candle-light from the chandelier fell on the white table-cloth, on the rich glow of the decanters, the jewel-like fruit; it also fell on the faces of Gustave Chauvin and his host. The servants had left the room; there had been no sound for some minutes, except the click of a spoon in Gustave's coffee. He was looking very grave, but his cousin was laughing heartily.

Lucien de Vougay was singularly like his mother; but he was a likeness of the middle-aged Marquise de Vougay, not of the beautiful woman she had been at twenty-six years old. He was very pale and worn; and his blond hair, his long, drooping moustache, and colorless blue eyes had also a worn and faded aspect; there seemed to be no life in them. Something in his mobile lips contradicted this, and suggested a lively spirit within the exhausted appearance; and his small, expressive hands, and his well-set head, were full of life.

"My dear fellow," he had taken his cigar from his lips while he laughed, "you look as shocked as though

you were an Englishman. What in the name of wonder can my approaching marriage have to do with my pleasures ? ”

Gustave did not seem disconcerted by his cousin's laughter. He was not smoking ; he sipped his coffee before he answered.

“ Then you have really made up your mind to marry Mademoiselle de Lanmeur ? ”

Lucien shrugged his shoulders. “ What would you have me do ? My mother tells me there is no other way. She shows me on one side my debts, and on the other the photograph of a pretty little person—with a fortune large enough to float me for some years to come. Yes, I have consented to marry Adelaïde de Lanmeur. I have no doubt I shall make an exemplary husband, and that my wife will adore me,” he stroked his fair moustache. “ I do not find women difficult, you know,” he said languidly.

Gustave was silent. He took a finger biscuit from a blue Sèvres compotier, and soaked it in his coffee. At that moment he wished his cousin Lucien were back in Paris ; he felt a sudden dislike to the fair, handsome young fellow, and a strange warning sensation fell on him.

“ You are not lively, *mon ami* ! ” Lucien said, presently ; “ be reasonable, cousin, and tell me of any chance of amusement in this benighted Breton hole. There must surely be a pretty girl of some sort in the village.”

“ I have not been to the village——”

“ Ah, my veracious one, I have you fast ; as sure as the sun sets this evening, you went to mass on

Sunday, and you must have had full leisure during the discourse of worthy Monsieur Édouin to find out any good looks among our village maidens. Come, come. I insist on your experiences."

"And I say I have none to give you," said Gustave, doggedly. "Even if I had——" he paused. "I say again, what right has a man on the point of marriage to wish even to begin an intrigue with a village girl. According to my notions such a pursuit is always unworthy of a gentleman; but in your position it is an insult to the lady you think of marrying. Come, Lucien, come and finish your cigar on the terrace. You will find the air pleasant, I promise you."

Lucien was greatly amused by his cousin's rebuke. His facile temper was not easily ruffled, although he had a way of revenging himself by bitter, stinging words. This castigation, however, he reserved for those whose good opinion he did not value, and Gustave Chauvin had gauged his cousin's character truly, when he determined not to be thoroughly intimate with Lucien. He had acted, unconsciously, on the principles of the old proverb: "Familiarity breeds contempt," and he had never received any obligation from the young marquis; he had given to Lucien much valuable time, and he had helped him both at college and since his return from England. He, therefore, possessed the natural empire, which a calm, self-possessed man, who has learned worldly wisdom by having made his own way to an honorable position, holds over a careless, light-hearted spendthrift; for, in spite of his sweet, easy temper, Lucien was often in scrapes, which made him *still cling* to his cousin's advice.

"I'll come, philosopher," he said, gaily. "I suppose you will lecture me even when my hair turns grey. Well, well; one of these days you will over-shoot the mark in your discretion, Gustave. You forget that you are not the only man here with eyes in his head. Now let us talk of those confounded creditors for a quarter of an hour—no more be it understood. *Canaille!* they do not deserve the honor of being discussed by their betters, my sweet mother would say. But that is all very well for my mother; you know as well as I do, Gustave, that in the next generation of Frenchmen, class distinctions will hold a very small place. As it happens, Mademoiselle Adelaïde is a lady; but money in due proportion, be it understood, levels class distinctions for me."

Gustave smiled; but he thought there was truth in his cousin's words. At the same time he told himself it was better to marry an innocent village girl like Liline, than an over-educated, over-dressed Parisian, the daughter of a rich man who had, perhaps, worked his way up from sordid obscurity as a money-lender.

"Well," he said, "you have to be thankful. It would have grieved my aunt sadly if you had not married in your own rank. Now about business."

The changing tints on the trees had softened into a deep olive, above which a yellow sky, pale, except where dark grey lines crossed it, changed first into pale green, and then above to luminous grey. There was not a sound, except the harsh cry of the night hawk in the woods, and this came only now and then. The beauty of the scene moved Gustave. Here and

there a vista opened in the dense olive masses of the wood, and showed soft gradations of color between the grass and the trees, and the dim, far-off prospect veiled beneath the pale sky. It seemed a sort of profanation to be talking of debts, of money flung away on worthless pleasures, and the extortions of greedy money-lenders, in such sweet and peaceful surroundings ; but he listened and advised as best he could while his thoughts kept straying to the house in the wood. Was Liline watching that exquisite sky, he wondered.

At last Lucien left the terrace.

"Good-night," he called out to his cousin ; "there is no use in my playing host to you, you are more at home here than I am."

He went into the house, and, crossing the large, gloomy hall, he began to go up the broad staircase.

It has been said that there was no outside gallery to the staircase ; the door at the top of the stairs opened into a long corridor which branched out right and left, and was dimly lighted by candles placed in blackened sconces ; at the mouth of the right hand passage, Nathalie stood waiting with a lamp.

Lucien guessed that she had brought him a message.

"Does my mother want to see me, Nathalie ?"

"Pardon me, monseigneur, but Madame la Marquise says that she is tired, and she has gone to bed. She sent me to ask if monseigneur has all he wants, and if there is anything that can be done for him."

Lucien had been only a boy when Nathalie came into his mother's service, and the grave-faced woman worshipped him.

Lucien looked hard at her set face. As a boy he had often wondered whether this demure, silent woman, who flitted in and out of his mother's room like a ghost, was all that she seemed to be.

"You can come with me and light my candles," he said. "I do not want Roger to-night, if he has put everything ready; go on first and light the candles, my good woman."

The candle light was hardly needed, for as the door opened, a brisk flame of wood fire shone on the hearth, and glittered on the heavy silver candlesticks and the gold-topped toilet bottles on the dressing-table. The dark, carved bedstead and looking-glasses, and the massive chairs, were entirely out of harmony with the rest of the furniture, which had been hastily procured from Morlaix in honor of the young master's visit to his estates. Nathalie lit the four candles on the table.

"Is that sufficient, monseigneur?"

"By no means," he laughed, "I see four on the chimney-shelf, and two on the table by the bed-side; light them all, if you please. Do not be stingy, Nathalie. I declined a public reception; therefore Vougay can well afford a few candles to welcome me with."

Nathalie lit the candles and then she made him a deep curtsy.

"You are truly welcome, my lord. I have the honor to wish you good-night and pleasant dreams."

She began to move backwards out of the room.

"Stop a minute," Lucien said, "you should give me something agreeable to dream about. Tell me,

Nathalie, you have not lived all these years in Paris with your eyes shut—you ought to be a judge of beauty, eh?"

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders.

"Pardon me, my lord," she said, demurely, "a face that seems pretty to me might not suit your lordship's taste."

She gave him a keen look out of her dark half-closed eyes.

Lucien was sleepy and tired after his long journey, but the effect of Nathalie's look was magical.

He smiled, and stroked his fair moustache rapidly—he always did this when he was interested—and Nathalie understood the meaning of the action.

"You can then show me something to admire," he said; "there is you mean to say a pretty face in Vougay. Tell me about it, and I shall see what I think of your taste."

Nathalie looked stolid, and she shook her head.

"I fear, my lord, there is not one; there are scarcely any girls in the village worth looking at."

Lucien followed her as she again backed towards the door.

"Listen. You know as well as I do, Nathalie, that there is a pretty face hereabouts, which would give me pleasure."

She started; Lucien laughed.

"Pardon me, my lord, it is not I who have told your lordship this, it must have been some one else,"

Lucien laughed again heartily; then he flung himself into one of the tall, dark chairs.

"Go on, Nathalie, tell me the name of this pearl

of Vougay—make haste, I am dying of sleep. Where shall I find her, eh? Tell me, and you can then leave me to my dreams.”

“But, my lord, what have I said? Pardon me, I do not think Madame la Marquise would approve of such an indiscretion on my part. The girl is already vain, and your lordship’s admiration would no doubt turn her head.”

“Peace; do not be silly, Nathalie. Who says I shall admire her; she may not please my taste. I look at faces as if they were pictures, then I pass on and forget all about them, unless—— but this girl need not know who I am, so tell me, my good woman, quickly.”

Nathalie still hesitated, she stood looking at the dark carpeted floor.

“Pardon me, my lord,” she said at last, “I dare not do it. If you go to-morrow to the cottage of the new garde champêtre, Baptiste Vivier, you will find out from him all you want to know, and you need not ask questions either. My lord, I humbly ask your permission to retire.”

CHAPTER X.

LILINE HAS HER WISH.

BAPTISTE VIVIER had said good-bye to Liline ; his gun was on his shoulder, and he was in the act of leaving the house in the wood.

"Baptiste Vivier, hold! Baptiste," came from among the trees at the back of the house.

Baptiste listened a moment. "It is the young lord," he said to Liline, and he went quickly round the corner of the dwelling.

Liline stood in the doorway. She was vexed to be taken at unawares, for her gown had lost its trim freshness, and she did not know whether her hair was well arranged. She had not even glanced at her mirror since breakfast ; and now, if she was to try and get even a peep at herself, she might miss Monsieur Lucien. Was it possible, she asked herself, that she was at last going to see him again ? The girl's cheeks burned, and her fingers grew cold, as she stood waiting. She glanced down at her feet. Thank heaven, she had on her neat walking shoes. She had always put them on to go to the château, and without thinking that she did not need them, she had put them on this morning also. She had intended to change her gown later in the day, for she had fancied that Monsieur le Marquis would keep late hours.

But after all her father might be mistaken in the voice.

Liline looked very lovely, as she stood in the morning sunshine, partly shadowed by the huge chestnut-trees. Her skin was so daintily fair, her soft, rounded chin, and firm, cream-tinted throat had a freshness only to be equalled by the fine, blue-veined temples, and the little pink ears, just now so flushed with excitement, that the delicate skin behind them looked almost white against her rich auburn hair. If she had gone to her mirror, Liline would, perhaps, have brushed aside some of the glorious confusion in which this hair had massed itself above her low forehead. The hair itself was not especially fine, and was therefore rebellious, and as the sunshine fell on it, a bright golden ripple showed among the auburn waves.

A sudden sound parted her full, red lips, and the pretty teeth showed within. Voice and footsteps were close by. The marquis was coming, then. Her heart beat strongly, and she felt vexed by her own want of composure.

She had dropped her eyes as she met Monsieur Lucien's fixed gaze, and she could not look up while she listened.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle," he said, politely, "your father tells me our woods are not new to you."

Liline looked up. She was disappointed to find that Monsieur Lucien was not admiring her as she expected. He had already turned to her father.

"*Yes, monsieur,*" she said.

But Lucien took no further notice of her.

"You two live here alone, I suppose," he said to Baptiste; "it is lonely for your daughter when you are away."

"Pardon, Monsieur le Marquis, she is not alone, a woman from the village comes every day to do the house work."

"Ah, that is well. I wonder if you could spare the woman to take a message for me to Monsieur Édouin."

"Certainly, my lord."

Baptiste's rugged face beamed with delight. His new master had praised all his arrangements; he had approved of a new plantation, which the steward had condemned, and the garde had felt strengthened in his good opinion of his master when he saw that, although Monsieur Lucien's first look at Liline had been full of admiration, yet he had refrained from staring at the girl, or paying her any compliment on her beauty.

Baptiste went to the door and called for Marie Jeanne.

The coarse-faced Breton woman came clattering through the house in her wooden shoes. She was trembling all over with fear at the unexpected honor of being brought face to face with Monsieur le Marquis.

Lucien looked at her with disgust, and turned away, and in truth, her harsh features, and sad expression, and the dull stare in her black eyes, repelled him.

"Tell her," he spoke to Baptiste, "to go to the

Presbytery, and to say that I hope Monsieur le Curé will do me the honor of dining to-day at the château. Thank you, my man," when Baptiste had repeated his message. "Now I will go with you. *Au revoir*, mademoiselle."

He raised his hat to Liline, and then led the way into the park.

"Is that our young lord?" said Marie Jeanne; "he is not near so fine a man as is father was. Do you not think," she said, slyly, "that Monsier Gustave has a more lordly air?"

Liline had stood in stupefied silence. The cunning expression in the woman's face roused her wits.

"I!" she spoke, haughtily. "What should I know about a gentleman's looks?—instead of chattering you should mind your own business, Marie Jeanne. Go to the Presbytery at once and give Monsieur Édouin the message—and then—well, you can see if that chicken of your grandmother's is ready to kill; she said I was to have it."

Marie Jeanne gave a grunt of assent, and turned to depart.

Liline went on to her own room; she wanted to be alone; she began to suspect that Marie Jeanne watched her, and this morning she could not bear a witness to her mortification.

Very soon she heard the clatter of the wooden shoes on the door-stone, and then the heavy thud, thud, as Marie Jeanne trudged off to the Presbytery.

"Thank heaven! I am safe for two hours at least."

Liline sat down in a little easy-chair, a gift from her patroness, and began to cry.

It was all over, then. For so many years she had looked forward to this meeting, and now she had seen the idol of her dreams, and he had despised her. He had not bestowed the notice on her which he would have given to a pretty child, for she had learned from Nathalie how keenly Monsieur le Marquis admired beauty.

"It was this hateful rumpled gown that disgusted him," she sobbed. "Ah, if only I had had sense enough to keep out of sight."

She had covered her eyes with her hands. Now she drew away her right hand to seek her handkerchief, for the tears had streamed over her face. The room had grown darker, she fancied.

"Ah!" she cried in alarm. She saw a face pressed against the window. The next minute she smiled, for she recognized Monsieur Lucien. She had scarcely time to wipe her eyes before he tapped at the door of her room.

"Come in," she said. She would not go to the door lest he should think her too much pleased by the honor of his visit.

Lucien opened the door. He stood a minute on the threshold of the room admiring the dainty neatness of its arrangements.

Liline had risen at his entrance. She curtsied, but she did not speak.

He bowed to her. "I fear I have disturbed you," he said, kindly. "The truth is I felt bound to apologize for leaving you so hurriedly; but I was unwilling to keep your father waiting. I thought, perhaps, now, I might come in and rest a moment on my way to the château,"

At this Liline opened her bright eyes widely. What could he mean? Why, he had hardly been gone twenty minutes; he could not need rest. She, however, pushed a chair towards him, and asked him to sit down.

"Thank you," he said; "but you must go back to your seat, or I shall feel that I have disturbed you. I fear I did, eh?"

He laughed and looked so mischievous that Liline laughed too.

"Ah, I am glad to see you laugh," Lucien went on. "You were looking sad enough just now."

Liline's deep blush made him inquisitive.

"What was the matter, eh?" he said kindly.

"I—I——" she stammered. "It is dull here, monsieur."

"Of course it is dull; a charming girl like you wants to be seen and to receive the admiration due to her. I cannot fancy what your father is thinking of to shut you up here."

Liline did not answer; she was delighted. Monsieur Gustave had talked to her about his love; but he had not told her she was beautiful—his eyes perhaps had said so—but it was more delightful to be assured in words. As she gave a sudden upward glance, she saw that Monsieur Lucien's eyes were fastened on her with undisguised admiration.

He rose from his chair and came closer to her.

"You are a jewel worthy of a better setting," he said. "I must talk to your father; it would pain me to think of you passing your life here when I leave Vougay. At what time does your father come in?"

"At dusk, monsieur."

Liline's delight overpowered her. She fancied Monsieur Lucien was going to tell her father to place her in Paris, or, at any rate, somewhere less out of the world than this wood—which now seemed to her no better than a tomb.

"Father is selfish," she said, and the anger she felt made her natural and unconstrained. "Father would sacrifice me altogether just to have me with him."

Lucien's eyes sparkled; he was stroking his moustache with rapid fingers; undoubtedly the girl was very lovely, but he was not quite sure that her innocence was as genuine as it appeared to be.

"Ah," he said, slowly, "that is a pity. It is natural, of course, that he likes to keep you with him—who would not?—but he must not forget that others also like to look at you."

Lucien's eyes were not pale now; the pupils had dilated, and the eyes themselves had deepened in color as he kept them fixed on Liline's changing face.

She sat quite still. She had read in one of Nathalie's novels that a calm, reposeful manner was lady-like, and also that it gave an especial charm to beauty. She had never been timid, and her intercourse with Gustave had given her self-confidence; her freedom from common-place flutter captivated Lucien's cultivated taste. It was rare, he thought, to meet with so much freshness and so much reticence in a young girl. He felt very inquisitive about Liline.

"You lived here as a child, I believe."

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis," she looked at him and he felt how fascinating she was.

"And then—what happened after? I am sure,

Liline, you have not been brought up in this cottage, that is impossible." He shook his head.

Liline was puzzled ; how was it, she wondered, that he did not know as Gustave did that she had spent two years at the Hôtel Vougay. Well, he could not always remain ignorant of it ; so, she had better tell him.

"I lived, monsieur, with my aunt in Rouen, and then I was with Madame la Marquise, at the Hôtel Vougay, till my father left the army."

"Really !" Lucien's eyes sparkled. He understood Nathalie's words ; and although, after a fashion, he loved his mother, it was amusing, after all her care, to be able to circumvent her, and to have discovered this little pastime for himself. "By-the-bye," he said, as a sudden thought came to him, "you know my cousin, Gustave Chauvin, I fancy ?"

Liline fell into the trap. She guessed that her lover had spoken of her to the marquis, and she wondered at it. Gustave could not be so very much in love, or he would be anxious to keep her to himself.

"I have seen Monsieur Chauvin."

She tried to speak carelessly ; but he saw the effort she made.

"Ah," he said ; "does he visit you here, or when do you see him ?"

Liline could not look up. She feared to betray herself, she did not know that her changing color had already betrayed her intimacy with Gustave.

"I have met him in the wood, monsieur. No, he *has never come to see me* ; I—I did not ask him."

Lucien felt inclined to laugh. The position was clear to him, and there need be no scruple on his part about supplanting his cousin. Liline evidently did not care for Gustave, and she liked to listen to him. Still, he did not feel sure how far he dared go with her; she might repeat all he said to her to his cousin.

"Well," he said, "I am rested; now I am going. I should like to spend the day here, Liline. Would it bore you, I wonder?"

She laughed and looked up with a bright sauciness that made her very tempting.

"You would get tired, my lord," she said.

He took her hand and held it.

"I do not say I should stop at looks, my sweet child. I might, perhaps, ask for a kiss by way of refreshment." Liline pulled her hand away, and drew herself up. "Oh, you need not look so scornful, mademoiselle. You have no right to distract a poor fellow with your beauty till he hardly knows what he is saying. Well, then, at least you will say '*au revoir*, Lucien,' and you will send Marie Jeanne on an errand, or, better still, give her a holiday to-morrow."

He kissed both his hands to her, and then he went out. As he passed the window he looked in. Liline was standing near, evidently in the hope of catching another glimpse of him. Lucien smiled and raised his hat.

"Poor little bird," he said; "she does not like dullness, nor sober-sided young men. Well, I must endeavor to give her all she wishes for. Meanwhile, if I judge her rightly, she will not chatter about my visit."

CHAPTER XI.

A REPULSE.

ON the day after the meeting between Monsieur Lucien and Liline, Gustave Chauvin felt troubled and restless. He had spent some hours yesterday, and again this morning, watching and waiting for Liline; but he could not get a glimpse of her. He longed to go to the cottage to satisfy himself that she was well; but she had already asked him not to come there because of Marie Jeanne, and he shrank from exposing her to this woman's gossip. He had guessed that Madame de Vougay had dismissed Liline from the château because she expected Lucien there, and he thought his aunt was right.

At midday Madame de Vougay sent for Gustave. She and Lucien were to go over next day to Plouanic, Madame de Lanmeur's château, so that Lucien might become acquainted with Mademoiselle de Lanmeur.

"If all goes as I hope," she said to Gustave, "we shall, perhaps, stay a fortnight. I shall ask you, my good Gustave, to return to Paris and settle Lucien's debts. It will be better, I fancy, for Monsieur Dupont to come to Plouanic, so that he may confer with the notary of Madame Lanmeur. But I am going too fast; all this depends on our young people, and they *may not care to marry.*"

"Lucien seems willing enough," Gustave sighed. He still pitied Adelaïde de Lanmeur.

"You must remember that he has not seen Mademoiselle de Lanmeur. Well, I shall not be long in finding out whether my hopes are to be realized. This is Wednesday; perhaps on Friday I shall send a messenger over with a note to tell you 'yes' or 'no.' Ah, my Gustave, if you continue to progress as you have done, you will be asking me before long to find you a wife."

"Thank you, dear aunt," he said, gaily. "I shall not give you so much trouble; I shall, perhaps, find one myself."

She shook her head.

"That is always a mistake, my friend; a man cannot judge as a woman can, whether a girl has good qualities for a wife, remember that always. Now I must go to Nathalie, and tell her to pack for our journey. Plouanic is after all only a drive of three hours from Vougay. If all is happily arranged, you will, perhaps, join us when you come back from Paris."

Gustave bowed; he felt sorry not to confide fully in this kind friend; and, when she left him, he started for a walk. With all his outward self-control he was sensitive and impressionable, and he could not shake off an inward warning of coming misfortune.

This depression seemed to increase when he reached a lonely heath, strewn with huge blocks of grey stone, on the confines of the park. The drear, weird solitude was more than he could bear, and he turned again into the park by its furthest entrance. An unfortu-

nate whisper had kept on telling him that then, even at that very moment, Liline was in some danger.

It was beginning to grow dusk as he advanced more deeply into the shadows of the trees. He stopped ; the pain at his heart caused by this constant harass and uncertainty was unbearable.

"If I go to the house in the wood," he said ; "Baptiste will probably be at home. I have nothing to be ashamed of. My intentions are honest, and he will believe me. At any rate, I shall satisfy myself that all is well with the sweet child, and I shall see her."

He quickened his steps. He was longing to see Liline. He had keenly felt these two days of separation, when he recalled the sweet, yielding glance she had given him just before they parted. The longing now overpowered him, and he wondered how he had endured the suspense of these hours. He believed that if Baptiste's approach had not scared Liline, she would have promised to become his wife.

He was near the cottage when he saw a figure among the trees. It was a man ; but he had thrown something over his shoulders, and his head was bent.

"Some friend of Baptiste," Gustave thought, "I am glad I have escaped meeting him."

A few minutes brought him to the door of the house. He knocked at it with his stick.

There was no answer. Presently, however, he heard the click of flint and steel, and a light glimmered from the window of Liline's room. Gustave went on to the window, and tapped at it.

"Do not be frightened," he said ; "it is I—
Gustave—let me in."

He could not see into the room, for the light had been screened. Presently the upper half of the house-door was opened, and he saw Liline.

He was at the door, and had taken both her hands before she could prevent him.

"Liline, my darling—my beloved. Will you let me come in? I have been very anxious about you."

She tried to draw her hands away; but Gustave kissed them, and held them fast.

"Please let me go, my father will be here directly. Do not get me into trouble. I dare not let you in till father comes. He would be so angry."

He loosed her hands.

"I am going to tell your father everything, my child; he will see that I am in earnest; he will consent to our betrothal. At most I ask you to wait two years, and I promise you, dearest, to shorten the waiting as much as I can."

He looked at her anxiously. It was not so dark here as it had been under the trees, and her face puzzled him—she looked sad and altered. He wished she would raise her white, drooping eyelids, and let him read her thoughts in her sweet eyes.

But Liline stood silent; her eyes were fixed on the ground, and her arms hung listlessly beside her.

"Dearest Liline, may I not come in and wait for your father?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him calmly, and as if she were ignorant of the true love that glowed in his face.

"Monsieur," she said, "you had better not say anything of the kind to my father—he would most

likely vex you, and for the sake of our old friendship I should not like you to be vexed."

"What do you mean, Liline? What is this?" he said, in alarm.

"Please go away before my father comes, and then I shall not be scolded."

"You shall not be scolded, dearest girl. I will go on and meet your father as soon as I hear his footsteps. I am sure he will be content if you are,—you are willing to accept my love, are you not, sweet child?"

He tried to take her hand again; but she drew back further from the door.

"Monsieur," she said, and Gustave felt chilled by her tone, "you are mistaken. I made no promise to you."

"Liline!" he spoke in a hurried, passionate way that frightened her. "What has changed you—what has happened? You accepted my love. Two days ago I left you smiling—the sweet darling Liline that I know you to be; you have kept out of my way since then, and now you meet me as if I were a stranger. What do you mean by saying 'Monsieur?'—you, to whom I have always been 'Gustave.'"

He was leaning over the half-door, his arms held out to her; she put out both hands as if to warn him from any nearer approach.

"You are unjust to me," she said, in a vexed tone. "You said you loved me, and you asked me some day to marry you. Your—your manner impressed me, and while I listened I began to think I could be *happy with you*; but—but——"

"You *have* changed," he broke in ; he tried to keep down his anger. "Some one has tried to set you against me."

"No, monsieur," Liline answered, so heartily that he could not doubt her. "It is not so. After you left me I reflected, and I saw that a marriage between us would be a mistake. We are not suited ; but we can still be friends. I want a friend badly, and I could trust you, Monsieur Chauvin."

She said this sweetly as she looked up at him.

"Friends! You do not know what you are talking about," he said, roughly. "I could never be your friend—unless I were your husband. But you talk wildly. You give me no reason for this change—ah, Liline, you have no reason to give, it is mere caprice—and yet," he added, bitterly, "two days ago you loved me, or else you were not true."

Liline was losing her calm. Something in her pleaded for this man—he was honest and true, he had loved her so long and faithfully. She pressed her hands together till she hurt them ; but she drew herself still further away from the door into the dark passage, as if she feared for her resolution.

"No, I did not love you," she said, at last. "I thought I did, and I wished to marry you while you talked to me ; but it all changed when you went away. No, Monsieur Chauvin, you could not make me happy—you could not give me what I want ; I should be miserable if I could not have jewellery, and nice gowns and bonnets, and a carriage, and do as other women do in Paris. If I must be poor, I may as well be here, where at least I am free?"

"Then it was not me at all you thought of marrying," he said, hoarsely, "only a husband who could give you all you wish for. *Mon Dieu*, who could have thought it of you!"

His tone mortified her. Liline liked to be thought well of by every one, and especially by Monsieur Chauvin. She was not wholly heartless. In spite of the new and dazzling prospects which had been opened to her ambition, she shrank more and more from giving pain to her old lover.

"You are again unjust," she said. "I liked you so much—I had liked you so long. My aunt, at Rouen, always said to me that a well brought up girl never loves any man till he becomes her husband. Until I began to think of these things, how could I tell? Yes, you are unjust."

She came forward as she spoke, and he saw tears in her bright eyes, raised so pleadingly to his.

Gustave was softened—he felt he had been hasty and suspicious. He would not give up his hopes; but he would try to attain a position as quickly as he could that would satisfy Liline. After all, she was very young, and with her remarkable beauty it was natural that she should care for dress; even his good aunt cared for jewellery and dress, and he considered Madame de Vougay a singularly wise woman.

"Dearest Liline," there was a pathetic earnestness in his voice that touched the girl against her will, "I entreat you to be patient, and I will give you all you can wish for. Already I have been successful beyond my hopes; and the wish to make you happy *will spur me on till I can satisfy you*. I hear your

father, I think, and I am going to tell him all my plan ; I feel sure he will consent to be my father too, Liline."

He caught her hand and kissed it passionately ; then he vanished into the gloom under the trees.

Liline clasped her hands with frantic impatience.

"Why did I not forbid him ?" she said. "I could have called out 'no.' He has no real love for me, or he would not seek to degrade me. His father, too ! No ! When I marry I want to shake myself free of father."

CHAPTER XII.

LILINE'S HOPES.

LILINE stood waiting, but her father did not appear. She heard voices ; but the wind blew the sounds away before she could identify them. At last she heard the well-known regular tread, and Baptiste came out of the deep shadow, an embodiment of the gloom he left behind.

He carried his gun under his arm, his head was sunk on his breast, and when he entered he pushed rudely past Liline, without saying a word to her.

She followed him into the kitchen ; she was indignant at such treatment. At any rate, in Gustave's case she was free from blame ; yet she shrank from her father's anger ; she had never provoked an outbreak, and she dreaded one now. No man had ever scolded Liline since her grandfather died, and she knew she could not bear to be spoken to harshly by her father ; she felt that she could not control her tongue if he rebuked her.

The supper-table had been ready before Gustave disturbed her ; and now she busied herself in cutting a hunch of bread from the long loaf, then she poured the soup, that stood ready on the hearth, into Baptiste's green porringer. She placed this on the table with a horn spoon beside it, and then she sat *down on the bench* beneath the projecting chimney-piece.

Her movement had not escaped her father's notice, but he ate his soup in silence.

"Liline," he said at last, "come here, I want a little talk with you, child." He tried not to be stern; but he could not make his tone pleasant. "Sit down." He pointed to a bench beside the table, and she sat down, swelling with sudden rebellious feelings. How could he treat her so, as if she were a criminal, when she had given up home to come and live with him in this desert.

Perhaps Baptiste was a little surprised by his own behavior, for when he began to speak, his voice was not steady.

"Child"—he fixed his open, frank, blue eyes on her face—"it is a great loss to you not to have a mother to guide you."

Liline moved restlessly on the hard bench. She bit her full red under lip till she hurt it; it was hard to her to keep silence.

Baptiste spoke harshly against his will. It was so difficult, as he looked at his lonely child, to feel that it was his duty to give her pain. If he had been with Liline all her life, and had seen her gradually develop from childhood, her blooming beauty would not have, perhaps, so strongly impressed him; but she had been little more than a year old when her father left her, and he had not seen her again till they met in the marquise's grand Parisian house; then the girl's dainty looks and ways had completely abashed the rough soldier; Liline, too, had at first tried to fascinate her father, and he had willingly submitted to his beautiful child as to some one infinitely his

124

superior; for he imagined her goodness to be equal to her looks. He often craved for more affection, but he supposed that he could not expect it. Sometimes the poor fellow told himself that so good a girl as Liline would surely be tender and pitiful to him in his old age. At present he was not much over forty, so he had some time to wait.

He had just met Monsieur Chauvin, and the news he had heard had upset him, and had dethroned Liline from the esteem in which he held her. Truth and honesty were Baptiste's cardinal virtues; and a deceitful woman was, in his eyes, worse than a thievish man. Still, he meant to let her justify herself if she could.

"Though you have not a mother, child," he went on, "you have not been neglected. Your Aunt Sophie was a good and virtuous woman, and I am sure she taught you that to meet a gentleman unknown to your father was wrong and scandalous——"

"Scandalous!" The word burst from her in a cry of anger. "No one dares to talk scandal of me."

Baptiste looked softly at her and shook his head; her eyes were hard and angry, and her cheeks were aflame; her lips parted, and she drew in her breath between her small white teeth.

"I do not say that any one talks scandal of you yet, child," he said, gravely; "they would not do it twice about you; they would have to reckon with me a bit. What shames me, and makes me sore, is that you should do this thing secretly. God help me, child! All this while I've been likening you to your mother,

and I never thought I was doing the sweet saint a wrong in her grave."

Liline rose up ; she could not bear this. Though he was her father, what right to lecture her had this rough, ignorant man, who could not even pronounce some of his words rightly. He had never been her teacher, and she was not going to submit to him now. Her self-will, so long fostered and cherished by the indulgence in which she had lived, rose up, strong and rebellious as an unsubdued colt.

"I know more about my mother than you do." She looked so contemptuous, that he winced as if she had struck him. The poor man loved her fondly, in spite of her coldness. "She would have seen no harm in anything that has passed between me and Monsieur Chauvin—she would have praised me for my discretion. Why, he wished to come in this evening, and I would not let him. He asked me to promise to be his wife, and I refused."

She looked so truthful now, so deeply injured, that Baptiste was forced to believe her. This was exactly what Monsieur Chauvin had said to him, and Baptiste had turned on the young man, and had told him he had no right even to seek to visit his daughter without first asking his leave. He had refused to listen to Gustave's proposals until he had spoken to Liline.

Baptiste's slowness of mind, the quality which Liline so despised in him, was helping him now. Instead of answering his daughter, as she stood there quivering with anger, his thoughts went over those sentences exchanged with Monsieur Chauvin. He

saw that the young fellow was in earnest, and also that he was deeply in love. Baptiste, as he recalled words and looks, once more doubted his daughter and believed in her lover. He wished he had been less hasty with Monsieur Chauvin ; but the shock of the sudden news that his "innocent child," as he called Liline, had met a lover in secret had scattered his wits.

"There was no harm in that, Liline," he said ; "but you must have given this gentleman encouragement. You have met him, and that has led him on to hope. Child, child"—his anxiety hurried his words—"do you not know that a girl in your class of life must not talk to a gentleman ; if she wishes to keep straight she should not talk to any young man unknown to her father. Monsieur Chauvin is out of his senses ; Madame la Marquise would not believe her ears if she learned that he had proposed for Liline Vivier ; and remember, child, that if he were not poor, he would not have thought of you. Let me tell you, you would be far more suitably married as the wife of Loic Perrin, at the mill of Rusquec, than to any poor gentleman."

Liline put her hands behind her, and made her father a low curtsy.

"Thank you," she said ; "I am not going to marry a miller, or a farmer, or a lout of any kind—or a poor gentleman either. You may be easy about me ; I am quite able to take care of myself, and you would do best to leave me alone."

She moved haughtily away, and went back to the hearth.

A groan from her father startled her. She shrugged

her shoulders, but presently she looked round ; she saw that he had set his elbows on the table, and covered his eyes with his hands.

"After all I am not wise," she thought. "I had best humor him, or he will watch me day and night."

She went back to the table, cleared it briskly, and then washed up the supper things with more cheerfulness than usual. When she had finished, she went up to her father.

"Good-night," she said. "You make me cross and hasty when you doubt me ; I cannot have you doubt me, father."

He raised his head and looked at her sorrowfully.

"God knows it is hard to do it," he said, with a sigh. "You look like an angel sometimes, Liline. There, good-night ; I am best left to myself to-night, child."

She was glad to light her lamp and to escape to her own room ; and she drew the bolt across the door, lest her father should repent his harshness, and seek a more loving reconciliation.

She set down her lamp and walked up and down her room ; she was too much excited with her long day's work to go to bed. Many things had happened, and they had followed so rapidly one on another, that she had not had a chance of thinking them over. She unfastened the front of her gown and drew out a ring, which she had hidden in its folds. She took it up to the lamp, and her eyes sparkled as she watched it glitter with every turn she gave it. Then she put it on her round finger and looked at it with pride. Not because it was Monsieur Lucien's gift, and because he had placed it on her finger, but because she felt

her foot firm on the way to her wishes. Only a lady, she thought, could wear a ring like this one. Surely Monsieur Lucien must have got it on purpose for her; it fitted her finger as if it had been made for it.

But the ring had an especial meaning for Liline. Monsieur Lucien had spent some time with her this evening; he had said he loved her, and he had asked for her love. Liline sat down and rested her pretty round chin in the pink palm of the hand that wore the ring.

When Monsieur Chauvin had said he loved her, she had been pleased and touched, but she had not felt frightened—she had full trust in him; but when Monsieur Lucien had bent over her, had drawn his chair close to hers, and she had felt his warm breath on her cheek, a feeling of terror, of mistrust, had come to her suddenly, and she had hardly been able to keep from crying out.

“I suppose,” she thought, as she nestled her chin into its rosy nest, “I care for Monsieur Lucien, and I do not really love Gustave; and yet if Monsieur Lucien had kissed me, I think I should have screamed.”

For when the young marquis had asked for this proof of her love for him, Liline had said she would never kiss a man who was not her husband; and then had come her crowning triumph. He had smiled tenderly.

“Then I will wait,” he said. “No, not for long; for when I leave Vougay, you shall go with me as my wife, Liline.”

He had left her abruptly, and before she could

decide whether he was in earnest, Monsieur Chauvin tapped at her window and had persecuted her with his dull, commonplace hopes.

She sighed. Everything would have been so easy if Gustave had not loved her. She could have taken him into her confidence about Monsieur Lucien ; for now alone with her thoughts in this silent semi-darkness it seemed impossible to the girl that the young marquis would dare to make her his wife. He was of age, certainly ; but how could he venture so to displease Madame la Marquise ?

Liline sat thinking long after her father was fast asleep in his box-bed in the kitchen. Her lamp burned low and spluttered ; but she sat still, thinking and thinking, till she had dreamed out a future as gorgeous as the sheen on a peacock's plumes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FOUNTAIN OF DRENNAC.

THE postman rarely came to the house in the wood. Since her Aunt Sophie's death, there was no one from whom Liline could expect letters. But on the second morning after Gustave's visit, the postman came in sight just as Baptiste was starting from home. Liline had not come to the door with him; she had been cheerful and docile since that stormy evening, and Baptiste had tried to make up for his harshness by every little kindness he could think of. He had brought her a pair of beautiful wood pigeons in a cage, which he had sent for to Morlaix, and her room was gay with wild ferns, and wreaths of climbing plants, which he had brought in from the woods. He had also brought a bowl of cream from the farmer's wife, on the further side of the waste, for Liline had said how nice blackberries would be if she only had cream to put to them. Baptiste's own habits were frugal; but he loved to indulge his darling in her whims.

The postman nodded at Baptiste; said it was a fine morning, and then he handed him a letter from his greasy wallet.

"It is for your daughter." He nodded again, and hurried along the road to the village.

Baptiste looked at the letter. It was addressed:

"Mademoiselle Liline Vivier," in a small, thin, female hand ; but it was not from the Marquise de Vougay. When Liline came out, he was carefully examining the post-mark.

"What have you got there, father?" she said ; "ah, a letter," she looked over him. "It is for me. It is from Nathalie ; she is with her lady at Plouanic."

Baptiste nodded, and winked :

'You must tell me the news later, I cannot stay now ; but I will be bound there is news in that letter—there is more I guess in that journey to Plouanic than there seems ; but I am not one to gossip. Good-bye, child.'

Liline felt too much excited to heed him. Nathalie had never written to her before, though she knew her writing. The girl was puzzled, and she looked all over the envelope before she opened it.

There were only a few lines on scented note-paper. They began "Dearest," and they were signed, "He who loves you."

"Do not believe a word you hear about me, or the cause of my journey. Meet me the afternoon you receive this, at the Fountain of Drennec in the middle of the forest. There I will tell you everything."

Liline trembled from head to foot. She went quickly to her room, lest Marie Jeanne should notice her agitation. Of course, the letter was written by Monsieur Lucien. But how came it that Nathalie had addressed it? How could that spiteful woman, this girl asked herself, consent to help Liline's marriage with her young master?

"It is his power over every one," she said; "it was hard, even for me, to resist him when he wanted to kiss me, and Nathalie has been his mother's servant ever since he was a boy. It will be delightful when I can feel that I may yield to him."

There was, however, something in the letter which calmed her delightful anticipations, and that was the proposal to meet him at the Fountain of Drennec.

The forest of Vougay lay beyond the park, and bordered the wild granite-strewn waste; in its very heart was the haunted Fountain of Drennec. The place had a bad name, a woman had been murdered there, and evil spirits were said to haunt the spot.

Liline had gone there once as a child with Gustave, and he had taught her to laugh at the legend of the evil water spirit, the Korrigan, who had been seen, so old Barbe used to say, combing her yellow hair beside the fountain. Liline had forgotten both the place and its history, and she had never ventured so far as the forest since her return to Vougay. Dared she go there, even if she could find the way? She could not question Marie Jeanne, lest she should be followed; she was so sure the woman watched her, that she tried to sit quietly at her sewing till dinner-time.

Baptiste had taken his dinner with him. He often did this in fine weather, so there was no fear of his coming home till evening. After dinner the girl sent Marie Jeanne with some new-laid eggs to Monsieur le Curé, and told the woman she need not return. Liline then dressed herself in her prettiest gown, and a hat which she had made as like the marquise's travelling hat as possible, and started in good time *for the forest.*

At first the way was very pleasant, there was plenty of sunshine, and the changing leaves took a more vivid color in it. At the end of the park she found herself in an oak wood. The leaves were a golden brown here, and had begun to fall, so that she walked on a soft carpet of withering foliage. Soon, however, the trees stood nearer together, some were gnarled, and took most grotesque shapes, long grey lichens hung down from the distorted branches; dark green moss grew about the roots, and a strange smell of decay revealed the presence of the fungi which Liline soon saw many colored, and many shaped, in the deep shadow among the trees. Some of these fungi were so tall and pale that Liline shivered.

"It is well that I am not altogether Breton," she said, "I might think they were ghosts."

She wondered if it was much further to the fountain, now. She had kept to a straight, narrow track, but at this point another track crossed it, leading right and left as each end curved and disappeared into the tree thick forest. Liline stood still and tried to recall her childish recollections of the place. She was almost sure that Gustave had taken her to the fountain by a straight path, and yet if she made a mistake she might never find her way.

Up the path on the right the silence was suddenly broken by the barking of a dog.

Liline grew white and faint. She remembered that her father had said only yesterday, he wished gentlemen would ask his leave before they took a dog into the woods; and she had guessed that he meant Gus-

tave. If this were indeed Monsieur Chauvin with his dog, her only chance of escaping him was to hurry forward. She hastened on ; but she had not gone more than a hundred yards, when the gloom suddenly deepened, the trees stood so thickly, she could scarcely find her way between them and through the close growth of underwood.

All at once Liline stood still and drew her breath with a feeling of relief. She knew where she was now, it had all come back to her. She saw that she had found the path to the Fountain of Drennec. On the right was a small clearing among the trees, and at one end of this opening there was a narrow green path bordered by rough lichen-stained stones, which lay their length on either side of the narrow, green way ; beside this, trees again grew thickly.

Liline crossed the clearing and turned into this path ; she slipped, and nearly fell on her face, on the treacherous green liverwort. She recovered herself, however, and went cautiously along the slippery incline till she reached a flight of broken steps. These led down on the left side of the path into a square stone-bordered enclosure, at one end of which stood the fountain. The fountain itself, built of square blocks of grey stone, uneven and weather-stained, turned its back to the way by which Liline had come. It looked weird and dreary with its surrounding of half-dead, gnarled trees.

Above it was placed the figure of a huge misshapen woman in darker stone than the fountain and below at, evidently, a much more recent date, a cross had been carved in the midst of the square, grey erection,

just above the small opening whence water trickled into a leaf-clogged stone trough below.

Liline stepped now into the enclosure and looked up at the figure, and then her Breton blood asserted itself; she shivered and she felt that her limbs trembled; it seemed to her those stone eyes were laughing at her with an expression of malice, and that the broken fingers of the stone hand warned her from the place.

Liline's first impulse was to run away; but she thought that this would perhaps offend the idol, and that before she could get out of the tangled forest its vengeance would overtake her.

She stood pale, quivering with terror, all thoughts of her coming lover forgotten as one weird tale after another came back from her childish memories.

The dog's barking came again, nearer this time, and the sound brought comfort. It may be that the memory of her visit to the fountain with Gustave had softened her towards him. She looked eagerly towards the side from which the sound came in the hope that he would come to her help.

Some one whistled the dog back, but the next minute she heard it come tearing through the under-wood with loud barks of excitement.

Liline was seized with a new fear. What if the dog did not recognize her, and flew at her? She gave an involuntary cry for help.

There was a crashing sound among the branches, the dull thud of a stone striking a body, and then the dog howled with pain. In another moment Gustave had leapt down from the further side of the enclosure, and stood beside Liline.

Her nerves were so utterly shaken that she clung fast to his arm, and burst into sobs and tears.

He was stupefied by surprise at finding her in this lonely place ; but he did not question her, he tried to soothe her ; filling the cup of his hunting flask with water from the fountain, he gave it her to drink, and then he led her to the stone steps and made her sit down.

He stood looking at her, bewildered yet overjoyed. To find himself once more beside her was an almost incredible happiness after these hours of fruitless endeavors to see her, for Liline had stayed indoors all the morning ; yet Gustave hesitated before he spoke. It seemed unmanly to take advantage of her defenceless state to urge his love when she had refused it

While he hesitated, Liline had recovered herself. She remembered that Lucien was coming to meet her here—he might come any minute.

“Please go away now,” she said. “It is very kind of you to take care of me, but my father does not wish me to see you or talk to you.”

“Do you really wish me to leave you here, Liline ? It is a horrible place, and not a safe place for you. The fountain has got a bad name. Before now I have seen beggars and gipsies here, people who might harm or frighten you. I cannot understand why you are here ; you know how completely the fountain is shunned by all the God-fearing people of Vougay.”

She was feverish with impatience, but she forced herself to smile.

“I am not superstitious,” she said ; “but if I were

to disobey my father by talking with you, I should deserve to get into trouble. I am not going to stay here long ; but I will not go away till you are out of sight."

Gustave looked at her, and the tender longing in his eyes softened her.

"Poor fellow," she thought, "it is very sad that he must be made unhappy."

He saw the change in her face, and his hopes revived.

"Let me say farewell, Liline. I have to leave Vougay to-night. I am going to Paris to make the arrangements for my cousin's marriage. Give me, dearest, this one hope to take with me, that you will try to love me a little. If you will be my wife, I promise you, by God's help, to give you all that you have told me you wish for."

His last words did not touch her ; indeed, she could hardly listen to them.

"The arrangements for whose marriage?" she asked eagerly.

"You have not then heard ? A marriage has been arranged between my Cousin Lucien and Mademoiselle de Lanmeur. It will take place in about a month at Plouanic, and there will be no doubt grand doings at Vougay."

Liline felt as if some one were stifling her, she could hardly breathe ; and the while she stood looking up at Gustave, with despair in her eyes suddenly the words of Lucien's letter, which had seemed meaningless as she read them, were clear to her.

"Oh, yes; I know all about that," she said, with a smile of superior knowledge; "but that is only a false report. There will be no such marriage."

Even before the warning came to her from Gustave's eyes she saw her folly.

"You know, Liline," he said, wonderingly. "How can you know?" and then the truth came to him. He had found the key to his puzzle about Liline's changed behavior. "Do you know my Cousin Lucien?" he asked, with such sudden sternness that she drew back from him in alarm. "Is it he who has told you there is no truth in the report of his marriage with Mademoiselle de Lanmeur?"

His tone of rebuke roused to action all the evil in the girl's nature.

"Yes," she said, defiantly. "He told me, and I fancy he must know better than you do whom he means to marry."

The tone struck Gustave with a new fear, but he was far too anxious for Liline's safety to resent the manner in which she spoke.

"He cannot marry any one except Mademoiselle de Lanmeur," he said, very gravely. "I have received instructions about the marriage contract and other arrangements for the wedding."

She shook her head, and looked contemptuous, but she did not answer. She was feverishly impatient to send Gustave away.

"Liline," he went on, "did I ever deceive you—you have known me a long time, and have I not always kept my word with you? I have even now in my pocket a letter in which my cousin tells me he

has promised to marry Mademoiselle de Lanmeur."

Liline changed color at this. Still Monsieur Lucien would not have given her that warning unless he had known that she would be led to doubt him. She looked up at Gustave—she saw how he loved her still.

"That is why he tells me this," she thought. "He is jealous of his cousin, and he tries to set me against him. Surely, I ought to believe most in Lucien."

And yet, while she thought this, an uneasy, miserable doubt strove to be heard; and though she was offended with Gustave, she longed to be at peace with him.

"Well," she said. She had stood silent for a few moments after he finished speaking. "You must, of course, keep your opinion, and I shall keep mine. Now, the sooner you leave me, the sooner I shall go home—it is you who are keeping me here. I shall not go away until you are at a distance. Please go at once. I cannot have it said that I have meetings with you."

.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COUSINS.

GUSTAVE looked at her sadly, then he bowed and left her. A strange prevision had come to him while Liline spoke. He seemed to know by instinct that this lovely, imprudent girl was waiting at the fountain to meet his cousin ; it might be even that Lucien had made arrangements to take Liline away from her home. Gustave did not misjudge the girl. He felt sure that Lucien must have promised to marry her before Liline would have consented to meet him in this lonely place. He was deeply, bitterly angry with his cousin ; but he had no time in which to realize his own ruined hopes, or Liline's folly. He had to think at once how best he could save her from his cousin's villainy.

He called his dog and went on for some distance till he thought all sounds of his footsteps must be inaudible at the fountain, then he sent the dog back to the château, which lay on this side of the forest. He found it difficult to make the wild, yellow creature obey him, but at last he saw the dog hurrying along at full speed in the direction of the château ; then he went back quickly but quietly to the fountain. He had made up his mind what to do.

Half an hour had passed since he left Liline. As he drew near the dismal place, a murmur of voices *reached him.*

Gustave had told himself he must be very calm and wary if he was to succeed in unmasking Lucien. He came suddenly in sight of the fountain, for there was a gap on this side among the trees, and he saw a man bending over Liline, his arm round the girl's waist. The blood flew to Gustave's head at the sight, a sudden, uncontrollable fury mastered him; reason and caution were alike overpowered.

The lovers were too much taken up with one another to notice his approach. Lucien was persuading Liline to come as soon as it was dusk to the château. Before the girl had consented, Gustave had sprung forward to the low wall, and he jumped down beside them.

Lucien turned round, furious at the intrusion; but the sight of his cousin checked him. He recovered himself more quickly than Gustave did.

"What do you come here for? Pass on," he said, haughtily; "do you not see I am engaged?"

Gustave looked at him sternly.

"You are doing no good here, Lucien; you must let Mademoiselle Vivier go at once."

Lucien was taken by surprise. He had thought Gustave steady and rather clever; but he had imagined his cousin wanted courage.

"Must! Monsieur Chauvin. What have you to do with the matter?"

"I am bound to interfere with you. You can have no right to meet Mademoiselle Vivier in a place like this; you have no right to meet her at all, when you are promised to another woman. Liline Vivier, if you have any respect for yourself, you will go home."

Lucien laughed, he was very angry ; at the same time his cousin's masterful tone amused him.

"So far, this gentleman is right, Liline," he said, "you had better go, as he will not." He bent down and whispered : "Come again in an hour or so, I will be here, alone."

He handed her up the steps, and waited till she was out of sight, then he came down slowly to Gustave Chauvin.

It would have been difficult to say which of the two young men looked palest. Gustave's face was the more ghastly from the contrast of his dark, deep-set eyes, so sternly fixed on his cousin.

There was a cold glitter in Lucien's eyes, very unlike his usual indifferent expression, and he looked as determined as Gustave did.

"Really," he said, with a sneer, "I do not want your guidance in this affair. I suppose I may sometimes act without asking your leave. You take too much on yourself," he said, with a sudden change of manner.

"Not in this case. Liline Vivier is my old, very dear friend. I have known her from a child, and I put myself in the place of her brother, or her father as he is not here."

"Nonsense, my virtuous cousin. Her father would gladly shut his eyes to my little flirtation ; he introduced me to Liline ; and what harm is there if, when I happen to meet a pretty girl, I loiter a few moments with her ? She is an old friend of yours, is she ? How comes it, then, that you gave me to understand you had not seen a pretty girl in Vougay. Aha, you are

unmasked. You meant to keep her for yourself. Eh, *Mon Dieu!* be honest and say so."

Gustave had cooled. He was not going to confess his own love for Liline. His object was to put a stop to Lucien's pursuit.

"You know as well as I do what you are about," he said. "I tell you of my friendship for Liline Vivier, to show you that I know she would not listen to you for a moment if she guessed at your plans. You must have promised to marry her, Lucien, or she would not have met you here. You mean," his voice trembled with anger, "to lead her to her ruin. I tell you, you shall not do it while I live. Promise me to leave Vougay to go with me this evening to Paris, and I will keep silence; if not, when I have provided for Liline's safety, I shall go straight to Château Plouanic, and tell everything to your mother and to Madame de Lanmeur."

He felt so intense a loathing for his cousin, that it spoke in his voice.

Lucien became paler as he listened. "You may do your worst. You are arrogant, and you are a fool. Who will believe you? You have no chance against me with a woman, and they are all women at Plouanic. Now be good enough to leave me. I am sorry to deprive you of Liline," he went on, in a sarcastic tone; "but you should have warned me off. Your secrecy has wrought your failure. I cannot help it if Liline prefers me; and I mean to enjoy my good fortune. She is mine, and your interference is a gross impertinence; it is unworthy of a gentleman."

Gustave's anger burst forth.

"You must apologize for this insult, or I demand satisfaction."

Lucien laughed insolently.

"I do not retract a word—the apology must come from you."

"Some one, then, will come from me this evening to arrange a meeting. I shall stay at the château till to-morrow."

"Do not take so much trouble," Lucien answered, lightly. "To-morrow morning I shall be far away from Vougay."

"You will run away from me, then? Are you a coward as well as a liar? For you must have told lies to that unhappy girl, or she would not have listened to you."

Lucien was not pale now; the blood flew to his face. He waited till his cousin had finished speaking; then he stepped forward, and struck Gustave on the mouth with his open hand.

Gustave Chauvin's eyes flamed; then he turned a sickly white as he struggled against his impulse to return the blow. He drew himself up and looked calmly at the young marquis, who seemed confused by his own violence.

"You can no longer refuse to meet me," Gustave said. "We will not wait till to-morrow, and for your sake it may be better to settle the affair by ourselves. Stay here while I fetch my pistols from the château."

Lucien bowed his head in acquiescence.

Gustave's feet seemed winged as he hurried up the steps and took the nearest way to the Château Vougay. Half-way he was tempted to turn back,

A terrible fear had come to him ; would Lucien profit by his absence to carry off Liline ? This terror quenched for a moment his longing to wipe out the affront he had received from his cousin.

But no ; in spite of all, Lucien must have some feeling of honor—he must surely feel bound to face the consequences of what he had done.

Gustave hurried on to seek his pistols ; they had belonged to his father, and they had always traveled with him.

Meanwhile, Lucien stood beside the fountain in a very peevish mood. He told himself this duel was a senseless affair ; he was sorry he had provoked it. He knew he was a good shot ; but he did not think Gustave was ; on the whole, he was sorry he had quarreled with his cousin. He might have pacified him—put him off the scent, and then his way would have been clear. He must disable Gustave. His cousin would certainly miss him, and then they would shake hands. He would have Gustave carried to the château and well looked after ; he would be well out of the way, and then he, Lucien, would play out the game he had planned with Liline, and to-morrow would probably find them in Paris together ; he would not be balked of his sweet prize. He was roused when his cousin returned far sooner than he expected him.

Gustave did not speak, except to ask Lucien to name the distance, and to offer his cousin the first shot.

“ I will measure the distance when we reach a fit place and we will fire both at once,” was the answer.

Lucien took the pistols, which Gustave had brought, out of their box and examined them ; they were handsome duelling pistols.

Gustave turned to the slippery, green path, and the cousins moved side by side along it, till they reached the small opening in the forest where recognition of the spot had come to Liline.

Lucien looked round him. " This will do," he said ; " shall I load the pistols ? " This he did carefully, like an adept.

Then he paced out the distance, and placed himself at one end, signing to his cousin where to stand.

" I will drop my handkerchief ; when it reaches the ground, fire."

Lucien's voice sounded strangely calm. He felt as if he were acting in a dream. He was controlled by his cousin's silent, unflinching gaze. Gustave's dark eyes were mournful as well as stern ; for, amid all his anger, he shrank from what he was going to do. He, too, had determined to wound his cousin so as to disable him. He tried not to think of Lucien's mother ; but her kind face would obtrude itself, and along with it came the face of Lucien when they had been boys at school together, and when his cousin had been sometimes kind and generous. But he hardened himself against these thoughts, he called up the remembrance of Liline, and he told himself that he was trying to save her from ruin. He fixed his eyes on Lucien with stern determination.

Lucien had taken out his white handkerchief.

" Are you ready ? " he called out,

" Yes."

The handkerchief fluttered to the ground. As it reached it, the men fired. Before the reports were heard, there came a woman's shriek. As the smoke cleared away, Lucien stood clasping Liline in his arms; but Gustave Chauvin lay motionless upon the ground.

"Leave go, Liline," Lucien cried, trying to free himself. "Let me go to him."

There was no answer. The girl lay heavy as lead on his breast, and as he looked at her in a sudden terror, he saw bloodstains on her gown.

Before Christmas came there was a trial at Rennes which created a great stir. When it ended Lucien Anatole François Bourbon, Marquis de Vougay, was declared not guilty of the murder of his cousin, Gustave Chauvin, or of having been accessory to the death of Caroline Vivier—which happened through misadventure. She no doubt had perished by her own fault—having intercepted the bullet intended for the Marquis de Vougay.

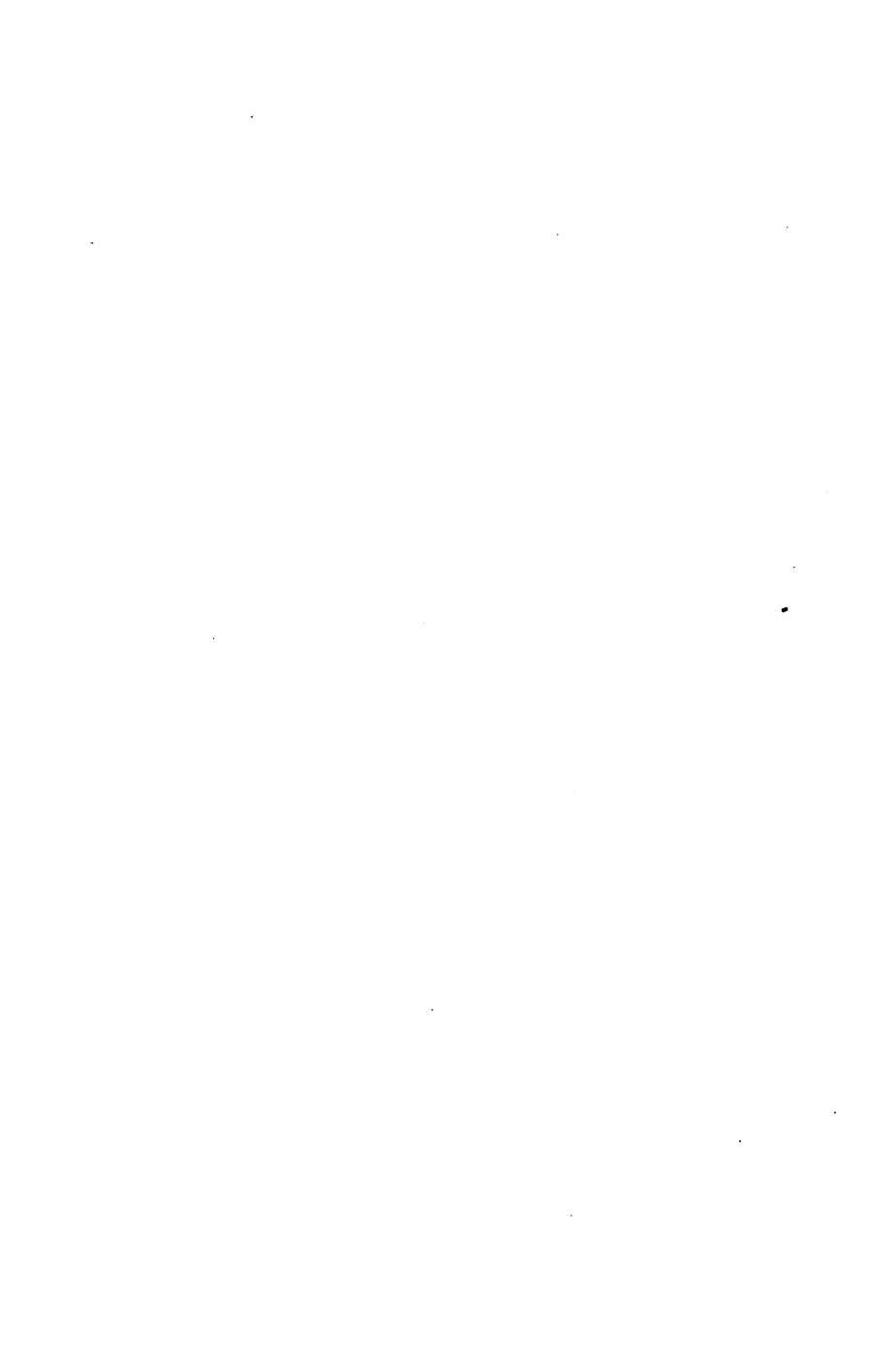
The young marquis was, however, condemned to pay a fine, and to leave France for three months' on account of the duel, although it was stated by his counsel that he had engaged in it in order to protect Liline from Monsieur Chauvin, who had determined to marry the girl against her will.

At the end of his three months' exile Lucien de Vougay came back, and married Mademoiselle de Lanmeur, but Baptiste Vivier had already given up his post as keeper of the forest of De Vougay.

THE END.



HETTY'S REVENGE.



HETTY'S REVENGE.

A NOVEL.

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.

Author of "At the Red Glove," etc.



NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH STREET, CORNER MISSION PLACE

COPYRIGHT, 1890,
BY
JOHN W. LOVELL.

HETTY'S REVENGE.

PART I.

HOME FROM SEA.

THE wind is blowing from the north-east so strongly that the long grey line of outgoing sea seems to be stationary, sometimes streaked with dashes of foam as if angered at having to fight its way against the cruel wind. It must be owned that the wind is in a tearing hurry to do mischief, and finding that it cannot so much as rock the stout stone tower at the pier head it rushes on with such mad fury that a strongly-built man coming along the pier stands still with his legs wide apart, and holds his oilskin-covered hat firmly on his head.

"Hullo, Bob," he shouts, "you have seen t' last of it."

His words were blown back in his face, for the young fellow he spoke to was some yards nearer the pier head, and now stood bare-headed gazing wildly after his hat which was already out of sight. The truth was, that Bob Filey, being a landsman, was constantly employed on his father's farm, which lay some little way up one of the numerous gullies north

of Eastborough, and a walk on the pier in a high wind was a sort of novelty to him from its rareness; he was not accustomed to fence with the tricks of this fierce foe as John Walker, a practiced sailor, was.

Bob, however, was so much pleased to see his friend that he forgot the loss of his hat and hurried to meet him.

"Eh, Jack, I heard a bit ago you were home, Bob's boyish face was full of affectionate greeting, "an' I thought 'twould be rare news to take to t' farm; nobbut you'll go with me now, Jack?"

John Walker clapped his friend on the shoulder. He was such a hearty, honest-looking fellow that Bob thought it was no wonder he had got on so well in life. Above middle height, squarely built, and bronzed till his skin looked darker than his thick yellow hair, there was a sweetness in John Walker's frank blue eyes and well-shaped mouth that easily won hearts to love him.

"I'll go with you an' welcome, lad; I should ha' gone to morrow at latest," he said. "An' how's all at t' farm?"

He colored up to his hair as he asked this question, and his honest blue eyes fell under the mischievous twinkle in Bob's.

"Father an' mother's all right," Bob answered demurely—then, as he saw the sailor's impatient, questioning look, he added slowly, "I'm thinking you was perhaps meaning Elsbeth?"

They were walking side by side, but now John Walker stopped so that his friend could not take another step forward—he put both hands on Bob's shoulders—

"You know what I mean well enough," he said. "Is your sister well—is she at t' farm?"

Bob laughed in the sailor's earnest face. "She's all right, Jack, she's as well as she can be. Hold hard," he said, as a sudden idea came to him, "eh, but you're not coming out to t' farm to rob us of Elsbeth?"

"No, 'tis not quite come to that." The sailor moved aside and they again walked on together. "First and foremost, lad, I have to learn how I stand with your sister; an' next, nobbut I find she's willing, I'll have to leave her in two months' time. I have news for you, Bob. I came ashore only yesterday, an' I got word that Mr. Mitchison wanted me this morning; an' what do you think he said to me, Bob?"

"I cannut say," but Bob looked greatly interested.

"He says this, says he: 'John Walker,' he says, 'you've served t' firm sin' you was a lad of sixteen; an' then he said some handsome things about conduct an' so forth; an' he ended up by asking if I'd like to take the command of a new coasting vessel that has been lately built for t' firm—she is to sail t' first week in June, a little over two months fro' now; but a good deal may be done in two months if there's no hindrance, mah lad."

Bob looked up at his friend with increased admiration.

"Eh, that beats all, Jack; you've gone straight up t' ladder since you were nobbut a little lad; an' you have nivver missed a rung."

John Walker looked uneasy.

"Somehow, lad," he said, "I do not like to hear you say it ; we know all on us must have throwbacks in life, an' I'd liefer have them young than later on."

He stopped—they had left the town behind them and were walking along the cliffs ; he had stopped because a tall young woman passed them and turned round so as to face them ; she laughed and held out her hand to John Walker.

"Welcome home, Jack," she said in a loud, clear voice, "you are a sight to gladden heart an' eyes too."

Her own bright, red-brown eyes seemed to burn as she fixed them on his face. She was a finely-grown girl ; her skin had coarsened by the sea-breezes, but her glowing cheeks and the rich red chestnut of her hair gave her a certain charm which, among the fishermen of Eastborough, was counted decided beauty. So that Hetty Graves was accustomed to be sought after and admired on the pier and on the Staiths, and Bob Filey thought he had never seen her look so handsome as she did now.

She kept John Walker's hand in hers while she spoke with her eyes looking into his.

"How long before you're afloat again ?" she said.

The sailor had fidgeted from one foot to the other ; he felt a little shy with Hetty Graves.

"A few weeks or so," he said, and he drew his hand away.

"I've heard of your good fortune, Captain Jack ;" she laughed, and showed her fine white teeth. "I want you to tell me all the particulars. Bob, lad, you're not wanted ; so you had best go home an'

look after your sister an' her sweethearts; Jack will take care o' me."

Bob looked suspiciously at his friend. Jack Walker had reddened with anger.

"Nay, I'm walking with Bob, lass,—we've no secrets. We're going to t' farm."

"What is your meaning about Elsbeth's sweethearts?"

Bob spoke sharply; he was quicker-witted than his friend, and he guessed that Hetty meant mischief.

"My words hev' always meanings," she said, "an' you know that as well as I do, Bob Filey; though a lad that has been on the broad seas these two years an' more cannot have taken count of the doings at t' farm."

Jack's face was full of troubled wonder. He believed in women, and, although he wanted to be free of Hetty's company, he was loth to suspect her of any malicious intention, in the way she had spoken of Elsbeth.

But Bob's anger flamed out at this attack on his sister.

"You sud mind your words, Hetty," he said. "Elsbeth has no sweetheart, an' you hev' no call to say as she has one."

Hetty's anger, too, had risen at the young fellow's scornful words.

"I'm none sùre o' that, my lad, the miller at Aislabie has been at t' farm, an' he's a warm man, I'm thinking, eh, lad."

"T' miller's a'most old enough to be her father," Bob said. "You just let my sister's name alone an' I'll thank ye, Hester Graves,"

"Eh, go your ways, lad," she laughed, with affected good-humor, though she was chafing to get rid of him; "cannot you see 'at Jack an' me hev' a word or two to say to one another?"

Jack Walker had had time to recover himself, and he was becoming very impatient to reach the farm.

"I tell you there's no secret between you and me, Hester, that is secret from Bob; he's t' best friend I've got, and he's more; please God, if all goes well, he'll soon be my brother."

For an instant the girl's face was pale, then the bright color flashed back in stripes across her cheeks and throat, she clenched her hands as they hung beside her.

"Coward!" the light in her eyes looked as red as her hair was. "You dare to tell me you are going to profess love for that little fool Elsbeth Filey, when you know you are only thinking of her father's money-bags!"

"Don't talk like a mad-woman, Hetty," the sailor answered; "perhaps it's best you should larn that Bob Filey's sister is the only girl I have ever cared for sin' I was a little lad."

Hetty stepped forward so as to place herself between the young men, then she whispered to Jack.

"D'ye mean that? Nay, nay, 'tis just a blind to keep t' brother quiet—Jack, Jack," even the whisper sounded like a pathetic wail, "can you have t' heart to steal one woman's love, while you are meaning to wed another? I've thowt o' none but you, I've hungered for the sight o' your bonny face, an' now I see you, dear lad, you tell me you're going to her—*Nay, Jack, it cannot be, it mustna'.*"

He shook his head. Her appeal had softened him, but he felt that he must not give her a grain of hope.

"Look here, lass," he said, "you should not blame me if you've fancied what I've never felt; what I said whiles is Gospel truth—Elsbeth Filey is t' only woman I want to marry."

Hetty burst into a ringing laugh. "See," she cried out, "how easy 'tis to gull a sailor! Poor lads, they haven't a chance against a woman. An' so you thowt I was set on you, did ye, Captain Jack. My song"—she dropped him a low curtsy—"I'd hev' ye be careful, ye set so much store by yersel' mebbe others may set the same, an' I've heard there's t' cutter in t' bay"—she pointed behind her—"an' now there's a many sailors wanted for King George's navy, they are whiles taken wivout askin' leave. You, Bob Filey"—she turned swiftly on the lad and shook her fist in his face—"ye've scorned me; well, no one ever came to good who did an ill turn to Hester Graves. Ye'll mind me, lad, one day when the black ox treads on your foot. For you—"

As she looked at Jack she seemed taller and broader, and indeed she had drawn her handsome head up as high as she could, and for a minute she gazed in silence at the man she loved.

She slowly raised her right hand and pointed at him.

"My curse on you," she said with blazing eyes; "on you an' on t' lass Elsbeth. You s'all not marry her. You cannot, for my curse shall blast you both."

She walked swiftly away from them.

PART II.

AT FILEY'S FARM-HOUSE.

ABOUT four miles north of Eastborough there comes a deep cleft in the stretch of moorland that crowns the bold heights above the sea. A couple of miles inland this cleft is merely a depression in the heather-clad moor; a depression, however, that, like the small end of a wedge, increases till it becomes a decided chasm or gully, down which a little brook finds its way to the sea. The sides of its rough banks are clothed here and there with gorse and heather, and flaunted over by long, red-armed brambles. A stone farm-house is so sheltered under the bank itself that a stranger to the place walking on the moor above would be surprised to see the curling blue smoke rising seemingly from the heather itself. To-day the smoke is blown violently about; as soon as it rises to the level above its chimney, the wind comes rushing up the gully from the sea and shakes the old-fashioned latticed windows as if it meant to loosen the diamond panes from their leadings.

Whoever built that stone house was aware of the turbulent visitor that so often roared up the half-mile or so of ravine that parted it from the sea. It was a low, square, two-storied building, with a projecting porch in the middle, that served to screen the *entrance door* from the wind's unruly visits. On

each side of this was a broad, low casement, and through one of these, in spite of the bright March sunshine, there shone the ruddy light of a wood fire.

Presently the lattice was opened and a rosy young face looked out, a face that reflected the sunshine outside, it was so bright. But Elsbeth Filey was not smiling; she looked towards the moor as if she expected to see some one coming to the house.

"Shut t' window, mah lass," a voice said behind her. "T' wind is strong enough to tak' it fra' t' hinges. An' sit ye doon; you hev' been working all day long."

Elsbeth went back to the oil-skin covered table and took up her knitting. She did not speak, but her mother looked at her anxiously. Mrs. Filey was a tall, buxom woman, a complete contrast in figure to her pretty, dainty-looking daughter, though it was from her mother that Elsbeth had got her sweet dark eyes and her soft wavy brown hair. The farmer had told them at breakfast the news he had learned yesterday in Eastborough, that Jack Walker's ship was expected to arrive; and Mrs. Filey felt that, if the news were true, to-day would probably decide her darling's future. She could not bear the thought of losing Elsbeth; yet when John Walker had left them more than two years ago, she had known what would most likely happen on his return, for he had said to her—

"If I am able to marry when I come back you will let me have Elsbeth."

The question she now asked herself was, would Jack be able to marry? and did he still want to

marry her daughter? Mrs. Filey was a practical, reserved woman, who acted on the saying, "Least said, soonest mended;" but she felt very tender to Elsbeth this afternoon. The girl had never talked of her feelings for Jack Walker, but the mother guessed them; she understood Elsbeth's mood to-day, and did not chide her for the restlessness that had kept her on her legs ever since her father had told his news.

Mrs. Filey passed her daughter on her way to mend the fire, she put her fingers under the soft round chin, and so raising the sweet face, kissed it. "Bless thee, lass," she said, and then proceeded to punish the logs for their blackness.

"I wouldna hev' thought," she went on, as she sat on the oak settle, "that I would so miss the dog; eh, poor Pete, his bark was whiles a cheery sound. If father donnut get anither dog soon, we'll be robbed mebbe before we know a stranger's by."

"Poor dear Pete!" Elsbeth spoke softly, and then she held up her finger, for she heard voices coming down the gully.

"Eh," her mother rose up, "'tis too soon for your father, lass; who can Bob be bringing along?"

She knew as well as her daughter did, and her heart was beating in a quite unusual way. She went to the door; but Elsbeth sat still; she did not know what ailed her, but she felt that she could not go forward to meet John Walker till his face had told her she had a right to cherish hope.

But she had no time to think; it was all over almost before it had begun. When the door opened

a mist seemed to form around her, and then through this came Jack Walker's face so bright and true and full of love, and—and then he was holding her hand in both his.

Bob's voice roused Elsbeth from what was like a dream.

"Well, you are a lass; hev' you not a word for a lad that has been away for two years an' more? cannot ye say, 'Jack, I'm glad to see you home again?'"

"I am very glad," Elsbeth said, and she blushed till she looked prettier than ever.

Then they all sat down, and Jack Walker related his good fortune to Mrs. Filey. He looked bright, but he seemed nervous and ill at ease, Mrs. Filey thought.

"An' how long will ye be away on t' coming voyage?" she said.

"That depends. Mebbe a few weeks, mebbe longer; then we come back to take in a fresh cargo; and then we are off again, but I donnut reckon we'll get a long spell, a year or such like."

Jack now looked very solemn and Mrs. Filey felt troubled. Suppose after all he had only come for the sake of old friendship to tell them his good news! She was inclined to laugh at herself; only just now she had felt as if she could never give up her darling child to any husband, and here she was actually fearing lest Jack Walker should have changed his mind.

The talk became duller as it went on, chiefly between Mrs. Filey and her visitor, till at last both of the speakers came to the end of what they had to say, and there was an awkward silence.

Bob, whose quicker wits might have helped them, had been lounging against the window seat enjoying the increasing shame-facedness of the sailor, and his mother's evident perplexity. He looked now at his "little sister," as he fondly called Elsbeth; as yet Bob had kept heart-free, he had set no girl higher than his sister, and he felt a sort of remorse when he saw how grave and shy her pretty face had become, while he had been amusing himself at her expense. He felt bound to leave her alone with Jack.

"Mother," he called out, "I'd forgot; I've a message to you from Mrs. Sleights at the grocery store; something's wrong in her last account; she's overcharged something or another; but if you'll come outside," with a vigorous wink, "I'll show you the whole matter, for she's wrote it down for you."

He opened the door and his mother went out, then he came back and clapped Jack on the shoulder.

"Elsbeth's in low spirits," he said, "but I don't know what ails her; you'd best ask her."

He shut the door behind him, and the sound of his laugh, as he went along the passage, made the pair he had left feel very foolish indeed.

Elsbeth's face became extra rosy; she reflected that Jack might think she was thrown at his head by that naughty Bob. She must prevent him from thinking so, for it was quite possible that Jack, as she had so often dreaded, had found another sweetheart while he had been absent.

"How d'ye think t' mother's looking?" she said in an easy, cheerful voice.

But Jack had become too impatient for any further

delay. He resolved to know the worst. No torment, he thought, could be worse than the doubts he had suffered from in this half-hour of suspense.

"I did not much notice your mother," he said, abruptly. He looked hard at Elsbeth a minute before he went on. Then with that sudden facility of speech which comes sometimes to a more silent man than Jack when he is bent on winning the love he longs for, he said hoarsely, "I'm a plain lad, Elsbeth, and one thing is as much as I can think on at a time. I ha' thowt o' you all these months and weeks, ay, an' I may say every hour; there's seldom been a time when I haven't called up your bonny face and wondered if I should see it again. I've wondered too," his voice had become stronger—so urgent, as he bent towards her, that she shrank away a little, and he saw it; "yes, I've wondered if 't would ivver be mah luck to tell you this an' get you to listen; an' what do I know?" he broke out passionately; "I may be too late now, you may be listening to me against your liking?"

He gave a heavy sigh, and Elsbeth understood; she was afraid to look up into his glowing eyes; but she felt that she had given him pain and that she must soothe it.

"You could not fancy that," she said timidly. "How could I help liking to know you had thought kindly of me?"

Jack trembled with eagerness; he wanted a definite assurance, a word or two that would give him leave to take Elsbeth to his heart.

"Kindly!"—he said passionately—"I couldn't

have helped it, Elsbeth; there's no kindness in it; I love you so, my lass, that nothing in life matters nobbut I can once hear you say, 'I love you too, Jack.' Darling," Elsbeth's head was so bent now that he could hardly see her face, "you'll say it, won't you? you'll say, 'I'll take your love, Jack?'"

Elsbeth's joy had conquered some of her shyness.

"Must I say that exactly?" she said, and she looked up at him demurely.

Jack threw his arms round her. "Little darling!" he was kissing her again and again, so that his words came at spasmodic intervals—"My own lass, I'll have no such answer, I've got a better one, sweet lass."

But Elsbeth soon asserted herself; she pushed him from her—"Let me go, Jack, Bob will be coming in, an' there—you've had enough, sir."

Then they sat down and talked the happy talk which only true lovers can find interesting. Jack learned to his joy how he had been loved all this while, although Elsbeth owned that her trust had sometimes failed her when she had thought of the many likely girls he must have seen in his long absence.

"It was different for me," she said, "I see hardly anyone, except at church, unless it's Mr. Aislabie from the mill."

Jack looked hard at her, but he did not doubt; how could he, as he sat with her hand tightly clasped in his looking into her sweet innocent eyes?

"That's as much as to say," he broke out presently, "you might have taken up with some one else if you'd had the chance, eh, lass?"

“Jack, how could I when I was always thinking of you?—Hark! some one is coming; don't Jack—besides, you have got to hear what father says.”

She jumped up and went to the window; she was still a little shy. Love was very delightful; but it startled her, and made her heart flutter wildly; she almost wished her mother and Bob would come back directly.

PART III.

AT THE WINDOW.

THERE was no one in sight, but Elsbeth heard voices coming from the strip of garden on the side of the house next the moor. She could not hear what was said; but she knew that her father and mother were speaking together. The girl felt suddenly chilled, and the warm color left her face; involuntarily she turned round to her lover, who had risen and stood watching her. It was a new, wholly delightful feeling that here was an unfailing protector; even if her father or Bob blamed her, Jack would stand by her always. Her little timid look of love brought his arm round her waist.

"Will father be angry, Jack?" she whispered, for her head was resting on his shoulder.

"No, honey," Jack said, and his kiss brought the color into her face again—and this time she did not shrink so much from his kisses.

But very soon the door was shaken as if by some one who did not know how to turn the handle, then it opened slowly, and Bob gave a prolonged cough before he appeared. He smiled knowingly when he saw that Jack had placed himself on the settle near the fire, and that his sister was standing by the window.

"*Eh, my song!*" he said, "'tis well to be discreet.

I came to tell you that father's comed home, an' he'll be fain to see ye, Jack."

"I'll go to him." Jack felt rather savage, for he saw how Elsbeth was blushing under her brother's teasing glances.

Outside the porch the sound of the voices guided him round the house to the little garden; the stone garden-fence was continued in front of the house, but nothing would grow in the strip of mould below the windows, so exposed was it to the fury of the wind; under the double shelter of the house and the loosely-built stone fence, on the side towards the moor, there was a pretty primrose border with plenty of tender green-streaked buds showing among the broad wrinkled leaves, and across the ash path was a sturdier row of double daisies, some milk-white, some red as beetroot; while others held a middle course and showed pink and red petals, and little florets at the edge of each blossom; "hen and chickens," Mrs. Filey called them.

Mrs. Filey had been gathering a bunch of wall-flowers while she communicated her doubts to her husband, and he in husband-like fashion had laughed at her.

"Just like a woman," he said, shaking his big red head at her. "Love and marriage, that's t' top of all. Woonkers, Lizzie, t' lad's thinking of other things nobbut lasses."

At this moment Jack Walker came round the angle of the farm-house, and Mrs. Filey, who stood facing the ravine, saw him before her husband did. "Whisht!" she said, "here's t' lad."

Robert Filey's broad red face was full of welcome as he gripped Jack's hand.

"I'm fain to see you, lad," he said, and he shook his hand as if he meant to loosen his arm-joints.

The farmer was taller than Jack, and looked yet taller from the mass of rich red hair that stood up from his broad forehead like a flaming crown. It stood out, too, straight on end from his cheeks and chin in the form of whiskers and beard, and gave a generally shaggy aspect to his massive head, so that his kindly blue eyes and benevolent mouth were out of keeping with the character his head at first sight bore, for his heavy red eyebrows—frowning a little now as he faced towards the sunset—had a decidedly pugnacious expression.

Jack had smiled to begin with, but as he spoke he became grave again.

"I would like a word or two wiv you, farmer ;" he looked at the wife as if he wished for her absence.

But Elsbeth's mother considered that all things relating to her child equally concerned her with her husband. Robert Filey chuckled under his red beard when he saw by her face that she was impervious to the sailor's hint.

Jack gave her another look, then seeing she stood her ground, he cleared his throat with an effort.

"Mebbe t' mistress hev' telled you mah news ;" Filey nodded. "Well, farmer, I hev' nobbut one word to ask fra' you. Will you say 'Yes' when I ask you to give me your daughter for a wife ?"

Mrs. Filey nudged her husband with her strong elbow, but she waited for his lead before she bestowed *her consent on Jack's wooing.*

The farmer frowned, pursed up his lips, and then winked his eyes in a manner which showed Bob had learned the art of teasing.

"Eh!" he said doubtfully. "So, Jack Walker, you fancy, do you, that you can gan awa' to foreign parts an' such like—mebbe leave a sweetheart or a brace on 'em behind you, an' then comes you as peart as you please a askin' for my lass; my song! it's she as will gi' hersel' away, I'm thinking; she'll noane be handed over like a truss o' hay, wivout a word to say on it."

"Robert! whisht then," his wife said.

"I'll whisht, lass, when Jack begins to speak; but he's in no haste to do it; he's thinking mebbe what gait he'll gang wiv t'other one, an' howivver he'll go about betwixt t' two."

The look of perplexed bewilderment in Jack's face here became too much for the farmer, and he broke into a guffaw of delight at his own success at teasing. By way of making up for it he gave the sailor a vigorous slap on the shoulder, and then shook hands with him.

"Eh, donnut be downhearted, lad, 'tis a' reet."

Jack looked radiant at this, although he gave an inquiring glance at Mrs. Filey, who had stood quite still through the encounter.

"Well, my lad," she gave him a grim smile, "be you lookin' for me to say thank you for takin' Elsbeth fra' me? If ye be, 'tis lang ye'll hev' to wait, I'm thinking."

Jack understood her, and he laughed.

"Nay, mother;" his honest eyes beamed with

affection as he shook her hand, "you'll let me call you mother, it's nigh gone ten year sin' I hev' had a mother of my ain; I'll not take Elsbeth fra' ye this whiles, not till I come back again, an' then ye'll be noane t' loser, ye'll nobbut gain a son by it."

The farmer turned his back on them and went indoors; he had given his consent; but for all that his heart ached at the prospect before him. His darling, the light of his eyes, was not to be his any longer; she would love him, he never doubted that, but he must be content with a second place.

"Well, well," he said as he stepped inside the porch, "we hev' all gôt to go thro' wiv it, I'm think in'."

Elsbeth met him at the door with a timid, shame-faced look; but her father held her face up between his two big hands and kissed her tenderly.

"Bless you, mah bairn," he said, "an' may you be happy ivvery day you live. I donnut bid ye make Jack a good wife, ye're too like your mother to make such a caution needful—there, there."

He put her gently aside and walked away towards the fireplace at the far end of the room. The daylight was already dim here, for there were no side windows, and Robert Filey felt sheltered from observation as he rubbed the rough sleeve of his coat across his eyes before he took his usual place in a three-cornered chair on the hearth itself.

He sat quiet several minutes before he called out to Elsbeth to bring him his pipe. The girl started, for she had fallen into a reverie; a sudden cloud *seemed to pass over her joy*. How could she bear,

she had asked herself, to leave these dear ones who till now had filled her daily life? She took down the pipe from the rack beside the mantel-shelf, and she was still filling it when her mother came in followed by the two young men.

"Jack says we shall have a dirty night," Bob said. "It looks snug enough here, any way;" and they seated themselves round the fire.

Jack and Elsbeth were not inclined to talk; neither was the farmer; so it fell to Bob and his mother to break into the silences which the others seemed to enjoy.

Bob was giving an amusing account of a fish auction he had lately witnessed on the Staiths at Eastborough, and the others were laughing, when he suddenly turned round.

"What was that?" he said, and rising, he walked up the long room and looked out of window. It had become dark while they sat round the fire, and Elsbeth had forgotten to draw the thick red curtains across the broad casement.

"My word! it do look a wild night," Bob called out, over his shoulder. "You're welcome to my bed, Jack, if t' best room beant fettled. I can do wiv a shake-down; you'll miss your way on t' moor t' night, gif ye try it."

"Thankee, I'll be all right," Jack said; but he too rose and joined Bob at the window.

"Elsbeth," her brother called out, "coom an fettle t' coortain, I cannot do it; an' it will serve to keep t' wind out."

He winked both at his father and his mother when

he went back to the fire. "They can fettle it between them," he said. He evidently thought that by this manœuvre he had effected a master-stroke for the lovers.

"Nay, mother," he said in a low voice, "you've no call to look over t' shoulder, they'll fettle it; an' they see best i' the dark. I read onst in a potry book 'at lovers' eyes served 'em for candles; let 'em be whiles."

It was plain that Elsbeth had forgotten why she went to the window, for no sound of curtain drawing reached the trio by the fire. Bob certainly kept up such an interminable chatter that it was not easy to make out other sounds.

At first Elsbeth stood gazing out at the dark clouds, which, owing to the light that came from the sea, were still visible. The girl thought she had never seen them drift so wildly, it seemed as if the swiftly moving wreaths of thin black vapor were striving to find a resting-place among grey cloud masses, so low that they appeared to lie almost on the face of the moor. She started when she found Jack close beside her.

"Darlin'," he whispered. "You'll be my wife soon, wonnut ye? You'll not keep me waitin' till I come back again."

She laughed. "We must hear what father and mother think, and I'm very happy as we are."

There was silence between them after this for some minutes.

Jack's next words were spoken in a very low tone; and then he looked over his shoulder towards the group beside the fire. He missed Bob; the two

elders were seemingly taking a nap ; but Jack was puzzled by Bob's disappearance. The big oak table hid the hearth-rug, and he could not see that Bob, finding his father and mother getting drowsy, had stretched himself out before the blazing logs and was teasing Elsbeth's kitten.

Jack was still looking for his friend when close to him came a shriek, so sudden, so awful in its agony of terror, that the strong fellow turned cold and clammy.

He was only just in time to catch Elsbeth as she swayed and tottered—the girl moaned as she fell back unconscious in her lover's arms. From outside there came the sound of a prolonged hiss.

The farmer, Mrs. Filey, and Bob were round Jack before he recovered himself.

"What ails her ; what has harmed the dear bairn ?"

Elsbeth's father looked angrily at Jack and tried to take her from him ; Bob too looked angry ; only Mrs. Filey was self-possessed.

"Whisht," she said, "t' lad's as skeared as werselves. Bring her along gently, my lad ; there, that's reet, an' set her down the noo by t' fire. Bob, I'll thank ye for a mug o' cowl'd water.

She waved her hand to signify she wished to be alone with her daughter, at which the three men, feeling themselves utterly helpless and in the way besides, drew off to the window again, and the farmer began to question Jack.

Jack's nerves were still fluttered and this made him cautious.

"I donnut know ; I telled ye I did not know. I'm as stricken as you are, farmer. I was looking fire-

wards, I could na see Bob wiv you, an' at onst Elsbeth gied a screech and I turned an' saw 'at she was wavering an' like to fall, an' she wad ha gone down too," he said with a shudder of horror, "gif I had na caught her."

"Was it Elsbeth that hissed?" Bob said; "it sounded ouside t' house."

The farmer glared first at one and then at the other of the two young men, and then he went back to the hearth and took down his gun. Bob placed himself in his way.

"Let be, there's mischief oop," Filey said doggedly.

"I'm going to see," Bob said calmly. "It may ha' been some stray coo or sheep that skeared t' lass. Bide a wee, father, whiles I look around." "My song!" he whispered to Jack, "it was an awesome screeel."

Jack's hair rose on his head as he recalled that fearful hissing sound; if Bob had not also heard it he would have persuaded himself it was fancy.

The sailor was stout-hearted, but that hiss was, he thought, decidedly uncanny; and although he went out after Bob, and they searched diligently round the house, he was not surprised that there were no traces of a visitant.

"Poor old Pete," Bob said. "This could na hev chanced if t' dog had been livin' yet."

Meantime the farmer had gone back to his wife and daughter beside the hearth, and very soon Elsbeth was able to sit up and smile at him. But when her father said—

"Whatever chanced to make you screeel, my bairn?" she turned so ghastly pale, and her fingers trembled

so piteously as she put them on his arm, that he held his peace.

Presently, when the girl had looked round and assured herself that she was alone with her parents, she began to speak.

"Jack had been askin' me not to keep him waitin' for our weddin', an' I said I could say naething till I knowed your minds about it, an' then on a sudden, eh ! it was fearsome !" the poor girl shuddered, and her increased paleness showed the effort her words cost her ; "a face comed again t' window—a white, angry face—eh, mother, I can see it now," she cried out, and she hid her eyes on her mother's bosom.

The farmer's eyebrows were drawn together so closely, that he looked fierce in his anger.

"A feece ! was it a man's feece or a woman's, lass ? "

"Whisht," Mrs. Filey said soothingly, while she clasped her arms round her daughter and rocked her gently to and fro as if she were still an infant ; "it were nowt but a fancy ; the poor lass is overdone and she got dreaming at t' window ; she was just frightened wiv her own fancy."

Elsbeth raised herself from her mother's arms and shook her head.

"It was a sperrit," she said earnestly. "Donnut tell Jack, it might put him out o' heart, an' it was sent to me, not to him, mother. Eh ; but there was hate in the thing's eyes. I can see them glowering yet, no human thing wad ha' so glowered at me."

She began to tremble so violently that her mother proposed she should go to bed, and she promised to stay with her till she fell asleep.

PART IV.

ON THE MOOR.

WHEN Elsbeth rose next morning she felt full of joy, the new life to which she had awakened seemed too happy to be true, last night's terror had faded away into an unreality, and she gave an extra look in the glass before she went downstairs to help the maid ; for Jack would be there to breakfast.

Her mother had told her before she went to sleep that he had been persuaded to stay ; for the clouds had burst into torrents of rain, and Farmer Filey had declared it would be running a serious risk to walk four miles across the moor in such pitchy darkness ; and as it was high tide it was impossible to go along the shore, which even at low tide was a very difficult road, beset as it was with countless masses of rock and slippery with sea wrack.

Elsbeth had soon got through her duties, and then she went into the garden to look for Jack.

She found him by the wallflowers ; he began at once to urge her to fix an early day for the marriage, but Elsbeth still said "No." At last she promised to ask her parents, and to give him a definite answer when next he came to the farm.

"Coom in, coom in the pair on ye," Bob shouted. "Father's callin' for ye, lass."

After breakfast Jack took his leave. He had

measured the size of Elsbeth's finger, and he was impatient to get back to Eastborough to buy the wedding-ring, and gift for his lass. Also he wanted to interview the parish clerk, so that he and Elsbeth might be asked in church the following Sunday. He had promised to sup with some of his mates to-night, and when he parted from Elsbeth he told her about this, and asked her not to expect him till next evening.

She had walked with him some way up the gully ; and now she stood watching him as he began to climb the bank so as to reach the moor.

When he was at the top he took off his hat and waved it.

"I'll coom early," he shouted. "I must sleep in Eastborough to-morrow night, dear lass."

Was it fancy, or was it a memory of last night ? Once more Jack heard that ghastly hiss. He looked round him ; he could see nothing before him, and on his right only the many-colored moor glistening in the morning sunshine, the tiny waxen bells of bilberry blossom still glittering with moisture ; on his left was the broad sea, blue under the cloudless sky ; behind him, and he felt as he looked that the sight made his steps lag as he began to cross the moor, was his dainty little love shading her eyes with her hand as she stood and watched him out of sight.

No warning voice came to Elsbeth of the great danger that menaced her ; but a sudden recollection came that this was churning day, and that if she delayed, her mother would be sure to do her daughter's share of the work as well as her own.

So she turned and went quickly back to the farm.

Five minutes later a tall figure, wrapped in a riding coat and with a felt hat slouched over its face, rose cautiously up from the heather and took its way across the moor. The first few steps showed that it was a woman, and presently she flung out her arms and groaned.

"Curse her!" she said. "I'd hev' throppled her afore she cud screel if she'd clomb t' bank an' set her foot on the moor. Call the likes o' her a woman! she's only the taste of one, t' weazen-faced slip! Eh! when Jack looks on me once more he'll no' go back to her. I'll see the difference when we next meet—nobbut she shall suffer for t' night's wark."

She muttered fiercely as she once more began her tramp across the heather, for she was stiff and sore from her night's lodging in the cart-shed; she had hurried in there and hidden herself between the carts before Jack and Bob began their search after the alarm last night; and now she was very hungry, for she had come to the farm last night about eight o'clock in the hope of meeting the sailor on his way home, and, as she expressed it, "makin' it oop wiv him."

She was so possessed with the consciousness of her own superior beauty that she felt sure of winning the sailor away from Elsbeth. She had to tell him something, too, which had happened during his last voyage. Her grandmother, with whom she had quarreled a few years back, had lately died, and, forgiving Hetty on her deathbed, she had left the girl a hundred pounds. This seemed a fortune to *the ignorant beauty*, and she had resolved to leave

it in the bank untouched till Jack Walker came back from his voyage. She was about sixteen when she first left her grandmother to come to Eastborough. The old woman had allowed her a trifle "to keep her from sin," she said; and Hester's good looks and free-and-easy talk had soon made her very popular on the Staiths, as the quay was called; and in the fishing season she found plenty of employment. Poor Hester, in spite of her showy appearance, was utterly uneducated. She had always refused to go to school or to be taught useful ways in the house, and it must be owned that her grandmother, herself an ancient fish-wife, had very few good ways to teach even if the willful girl had been willing to learn them.

Hetty had fallen in love, as she said, at first sight with Jack Walker when she first met him on the pier at Eastborough. He had talked to her and laughed with her as the other sailors did, but he had gone away to sea again without any memory of the bold, showy damsel who had meantime completely lost her heart to him. On his next return he only spent a few days in Eastborough, and he only saw Hetty twice, for he took care to avoid her afterwards. Her behavior annoyed him; she laid claim to his attention in such a noisy demonstrative way that he feared some exaggerated report might reach the farm.

Bob Filey had at that time questioned Jack about Hetty, and had told him that in his absence the girl had spoken of him as her sweetheart.

"It's false," Jack had answered angrily. "She has not a claim on me;" and to avoid another meeting he went over to Runswick for the rest of his stay

ashore, Runswick being nearer to the farm than Eastborough was.

Yesterday, when Hetty had spoken to him and Bob as they walked along the cliffs, Jack saw sudden suspicion in his friend's eyes, and at night when they went out together to discover the cause of Elsbeth's alarm Bob said, in a vexed tone—

"I tell ye what it is, Jack; it's always best to be off wiv t' old love afore you take on wiv a new sweetheart. I'll be bound it were Hester playing you a trick, watching you wiv Elsbeth; t' lass is jealous along of you."

At this Jack had grasped the lantern in his friend's hand and held it so as to throw the light on his own face as he answered—

"So help me, God," he said, "I nivver sought t' lass; Hetty's nowt to me. I've nobbut spoken to her wiv t' rest on 'em. Could ye fancy, Bob, for a moment that sik a lass as thaat could tempt me fra' Elsbeth?"

And Bob had answered—

"I believe you, Jack."

Now as Jack Walker went rapidly across the moor to Eastborough, he felt uneasy when he recalled Bob's suggestion about Hester. No one had told him of the face which Elsbeth had seen, for her parents had decided that it was an hysterical fancy, and that it was best not to speak of it, so nothing more had been said on the subject. Bob was so full of his own ideas about Hester that he had been silent through the rest of the evening.

Jack knew very little about a woman's feelings;

his idea of a girl was that if she were dealt with honestly and kindly, she might be led to see things in the right way, and now he decided that he had best not avoid Hester Graves. He would rather seek an opportunity to explain himself, and if possible he would ask her to withdraw her curse which weighed heavily on his superstitious soul. It seemed to him that her words had probably caused Elsbeth's sudden illness. He had little idea of the strength of Hester's nature; he told himself that when she realized he would soon be Elsbeth's husband, and when he should explain to her how long they had loved one another, she would be pacified and leave him and his lass in peace.

He said to himself, "Why should a lass like her pine for what belongs to some one else? She is too proud for that. A handsome lass like Hetty can pick an' choose among the likeliest sailors on the Staiths."

But though he went across the Staiths on his way to his employer's office, he did not meet Hester Graves.

There was a great deal of business to be talked over with the shipowner, and when afternoon came Jack had another interview with Mr. Mitchison. As he was leaving him the merchant said—

"I believe you are thinking of getting married, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

Jack looked delighted at this mark of sympathy, though he was surprised to find Mr. Mitchison knew about his intended marriage.

"It is to that fine young woman, Hester Graves, I think her name is?"

Jack started, and the man of business saw the change in his face.

"No, sir," Jack answered in a slow, determined voice. "I'm going to marry Farmer Filey's daughter. I niver thowt o' wedding any ither. Me an' Elsbeth Filey are old acquaintances."

"Is that so? I suppose there's some mistake."

Mr. Mitchison seemed puzzled. On the previous evening he had met Hester just before she saw the two young men, and she had asked him if it was true that he had made Jack Walker captain of his new trading coaster, and when he told her it was so she said—

"Jack is my sweetheart, an' now he can tak' a wife if he chooses."

Mr. Mitchison had been surprised. He knew that this girl had a free way with every one, and he told his wife so when he got home, with the comment that he fancied Jack Walker would have been more fastidious. It now appeared to him that Jack must have given some color to the news he had heard; and then as he looked up into the sailor's honest face—for Mr. Mitchison was little and round—he felt that this was not the man likely to deceive a girl so as to make her think he meant marriage.

"Well," he said, "I'm glad to hear it, John Walker. The Fileys are well-respected people, and will have given their daughter a good bringing-up."

"Yes, sir, that they have done."

And then Jack departed. He was in a hurry; for

he had to go and choose the wedding-ring, and he also wanted to get a love-token for his darling before he went to join his mates at supper at the tavern called "The Jolly Sailors."

PART V.

A WARNING.

JACK rose late next morning with a splitting headache. His mates had forced him to take more grog than he cared for, and the evening had passed very noisily. There had been a good deal of discussion about the cutter just outside the harbor; some of the men asserted that she was a sham, and was in reality a foreign trader in smuggled goods, while others were equally positive that the craft belonged to His Majesty's navy, and was on the look out for men. There had been a desperate encounter on the Staiths in the previous year between a boat's crew bent on this unpopular work and the stout Eastborough men, and it was thought that if another attempt was made by a press gang it would have to be done warily so as to avoid any open hostilities. Jack listened, but the noisy discussion did not interest him. He was thinking how much happier he should be at Filey's farm this evening, and he kept on wondering what his dear little Elsbeth was doing. He had not spoken of his engagement to his mates, and he got some rough joking about Hetty Graves. It was a relief to him when the party separated.

This morning he had to go and see the parish clerk, who lived at the other side of the harbor, and to make a few other arrangements; after that he

found he should have time to find Hetty before he started for the farm.

He went to every place where he thought she might be, but he could not find her; he did not care to make inquiries for her at her lodgings in a small town like Eastborough, he knew the danger of providing food for gossips. Still, when on the pier he met an old crony, Matt Thorp by name, he asked the grey-bearded fisherman if he had seen Hetty Graves that morning.

The square-made old fisherman hitched up his blue trowsers and looked out from under his yellow oil-skin sou'-wester rather mockingly, Jack fancied.

"I hev' not seean t' lass; eh, but she were touch-an'-go yesternoon." He paused a minute and took a long look at Jack Walker. "What for," he said, "comes you speering after Hester Graves? ye're not t' lad to play fast-an'-loose wiv two lasses at onst, an' Hetty's not t' lass to be set aside for t'other un; so now ye know."

"Hetty's nought to me," said Jack. "She's nobbut an acquaintance, an' I only speak wiv her now an' again when we meet. I'm going to marry wiv Farmer Filey's daughter," he pointed northwards. "'Twas nobbut a word or two I had to say this afternoon to Hetty on a business matter."

Matt looked at him more cheerfully. "I wish you joy," he said; "I thowt Hetty was not t' sort for you, thof she's a fine lass, an' mebbe a lad she fancied might do worse than wed her. Nae, lad, I've not set eyes on her sin' yesternoon."

The impatient lover felt that he had done his duty.

he nodded to the fisherman, and took his way to the cliffs; these were barren for some distance, but the grand view of the coast and of the ruined abbey at the opposite side of the bay always had a fascination for Jack Walker, and he was sorry when presently a broad chasm in the chain of cliffs obliged him to strike landwards for the moor.

On its fringe, at a point he must pass to gain the ordinary footpath, he saw before him what looked like the figure of a woman. His heart beat more quickly; he wondered whether Elsbeth had come to meet him. A few steps nearer, however, showed him that this woman was much larger than his little darling, and he felt chilled when he recognized Hetty Graves.

"Well, I'm just a fool," came as his next thought. "I've been wasting time in seeking her an' now I've found her I feel sorry." He felt impatient too, for he grudged every moment that kept him from his sweet Elsbeth.

Hetty looked softened, he thought, when they met, and he could see she had been crying, as she held out her hand—

"I ask pardon, Jack," she said. "I want to take back my words; mebbe you did not heed them, but they were foolish, Jack; make up, an' be friends again."

Jack shook her hand heartily, and then he hesitated how he should begin. He was never ready-witted, he wanted to say, "We have been acquaintances rather than friends," and yet this might vex *her*, and he did not want to wound her if he could *avoid it*.

"Well, lass," he cleared his throat, and looked her full in the face; "I like to feel in friendship with ivvery one, an' just now I feel too happy to be vexed. I'm goin' on to Filey's farm."

She bit her full red under lip. "Are you so, lad, I'll walk wiv you; the sight of you does me good. Mebbe I'm floutersome whiles. Eh, Jack, lad! where there's a strong warm love there's aye a sperit along wiv it. Eh, Jack! what can a cold, white-blooded lass give to a man beside such a love as mine?—a love, I tell ye, that gives itself an' all, and puts all it has under the dear lad's feet, fain to be his slave, body and soul, for ivvermore."

She stood still as she ended, her shapely brown hands pressed on her panting bosom as if she tried to keep in the passion she had poured forth in such glowing words.

They stirred Jack even while they revolted him. It seemed to him that he could not go on, after this confession his proposed frankness would only vex Hester, but it would be kinder, he fancied, and he thought it was possible to ignore the true meaning of her words.

"Well, lass," he said, "I must hasten on, and I think ye'll not care to tramp wiv me at sich a pace as mine is. You'll love your husband well, that you will, lass, an' I'll hope to see ye well mated."

She caught at his arm. "Stop, lad; tell me, if ye saw a friend on t' moor, nigh the brink o' one of t' pots they tell on, an' you saw he knawed nought about 'un, wadna ye call out to him to save himself whilst there was time? Tell me that, lad."

Jack was taken by surprise ; she spoke so calmly, though her eyes had a strange glitter in them

" Surely, lass, ony Christian man wad do the like ; 'twad be a simple duty." He looked inquiringly at her.

She had kept her grasp of his arm ; now her lissom fingers slid down his coat-sleeve and she clasped his hard hand between both of hers.

" Ye bid me speak, then. I tell ye, Jack Walker, as sure as there's a heaven above us and a hell beneath our foot, you go to your ruin if ye seek to wed wiv Elsbeth Filey."

Her tragic tone startled him ; as she stood with her bright, red-brown eyes fixed on his, she seemed to Jack like an inspired prophetess of evil.

" I cannot listen to you, lass ;"—he tried to draw his hand away ; but she held it so tightly he could not do it without violence :—" I've known the farmer an' ivvery one of t' Fileys sin I wur a lad ; I know them better than any ither does ; 'tis too late to tell me I could get harm fra t' likes of them."

" I didna say they wad harm you. Harm comes to a lad frae hissel', an' when he makes a wrong choice he'll turn again' his wife, an' then he'll go adrift. Listen, Jack—it's Elsbeth's money as tempts you—let it bide. In t' Bank at Eastborough there's a hundred pounds o' mine, an' it's yours for t' asking. I've saved it for you, lad."

" Lass, lass," he said, and he pulled his hand impatiently away ; " I canna stay havoring wiv you ; I tell ye I'm going to marry Elsbeth Filey in three weeks. You know I've niver given you cause of

complaint. I've been no more friendly to you than the other lads hev been, Hetty—you know that well, lass."

"Is that all you can say to me?" She spoke bitterly, but he was surprised at her reticence; he had expected another tempest of anger. She waited, and he was obliged to answer.

"Yes. Good-bye to ye, lass."

He was sorry for her, but he was getting anxious to go. If this meeting was seen by Farmer Filey or his son, he knew that it might be misconstrued, and yet he could not explain it away without betraying Hetty's folly.

"I'll give you one more warning," she said in a choked voice. "You'll no marry that puny lass; you cannot, for I will prevent it. When your trouble comes you'll mebbe wish you had been kinder to Hetty. It will come; think on it, lad," she said, in a tone of solemn warning; "think on t' while there's yet time to turn. Go you back to Eastborough an' noane shall harm you; go on t' farm an' stay there till t' turn o' t' tide, and then, lad, neither God nor man 'ull help ye—you'll have brought down your doom on your own head. Think on it, I tell ye."

She flung herself away from him and went rapidly along the path leading to the cliffs. "I have work before me," she muttered, "but 'tis early; I mun see t' boatswain, but there's hours yet till t' turn o' t' tide."

Jack seemed to have forgotten his hurry; he stood open-mouthed, staring after Hetty. Presently he took out his handkerchief and slowly wiped his fore-

head, although, certainly, it was not a warm afternoon.

“ Good Lord,” he said reverently ; “ I nivver thowt a woman cud be like that ’un—she’s a fury. There’s a space between her an’ my darling, that’s sure.”

PART VI.

GONE.

THE afternoon passed very happily with the lovers. Elsbeth met Jack in the gully, and they went down to the sea together, and he told her about the tides and some other shore and sea knowledge with which she was unfamiliar. Then she took him into the farm dairy, where he said he was thirsty; and while he drank a tumblerful of milk she showed him her lumps of exquisite cowslip-hued butter; there was not much of it, certainly, Bob having taken the chief part of it to Runswick, where Mrs. Filey's butter was a well-known and sought-after product. Still that which remained looked very cool and pleasant resting on a white slab of limestone marble against the wall on one side; while on the other were set on a long stone shelf four huge pans, one filled with milk, the others in various stages of cream-setting. In the middle stood a barrel churn, as if it considered itself the most important tenant of the little cool place. The dairy was rather dark, the windows being small lattices on either side, with tiny leaded lozenge panes.

Jack thought it a pleasant place for getting the wedding day fixed, and if any one had peered in through one of the small windows he or she would have seen a pretty picture. The handsome, sun-browned man bending down over the pretty, blushing

girl while he tried the plain gold ring on her finger. Elsbeth looked very serious through her blushes; for she had just promised to marry Jack that day three weeks; and as he put on the ring she seemed to realize that marriage meant something higher and holier than a mere interchange of loving words and kisses.

"Eh, Jack," she said timidly, "are you sure I'll make you happy?" Jack's answer was to kiss her rapturously. "Jack, dear," she pushed him a little away that she might look into his eyes, "I don't mean that I donnot love you truly—nobbut I'm silly and weak, I mean that I'm noane sure I'm good enough for you."

"If you're not, my darling, then no one is." Jack spoke seriously now. "'Twas your goodness that made me love ye long afore I let ye see I'd set my heart on ye. You were allus sik a modest lass wiv niver a free word for a lad at any time."

She smiled up fondly in his face.

"Eh, Jack, but you munna make me vain." Then she went on gravely: "I'll tell ye what I think marriage suld be. Husband an' wife sud allus be helpin' one another to be good, like the angels is sent to help us, Jack, you know."

They must have stayed some time in the dairy, for Elsbeth was surprised to hear her mother's voice calling them in to tea.

They found Mrs. Filey busy buttering delicious-looking hot cakes before the fire, and in a few minutes more Bob and the farmer came in, and the party sate down to a plentiful tea. The good wife was very

particular about the hours of meals. She liked to see her excellent fare done justice to.

Afterwards, while they all sate round the fire, Jack suddenly broke into one of Bob's facetious stories.

"We hev fixed oop t'wedding, farmer," he said. "If so be you an' t'missus there are willin', we would like it to be this day three weeks."

Bob broke in before either father or mother could speak:

"Woonkers! You nivver axes if I'm willin'. You forgits Elsbeth's my sister," he said with mock dignity.

Jack entered into the joke. "Eh!" he laughed; "I were coomin' to you, lad; you mun be my best mon an' fettle ivverything wiv me."

Meanwhile Elsbeth had risen from her seat. She went with a blushing face first to her father and then to her mother, and was solemnly kissed by them in token of their consent.

It was curious, looking round the group, to see how serious Jack's announcement had made the little party; even Bob, after the first, seemed to feel a weight on his spirits, and sat silent, looking into the fire. The farmer and his wife were both struggling against their unwillingness to part from their darling, and also they had each their special subjects of thought. Mrs. Filey thought that a bride should have an outfit to last at least six years, and she was wondering how this could be properly provided within three weeks; while the farmer was settling how large a sum of ready money he could give his daughter, besides that already invested to pass to *her at his death*.

Even Jack was impressed by the general silence. The only person who seemed untouched by it was Elsbeth. She had placed herself between her father and her lover. It seemed to her unfair to devote herself entirely to Jack when she was going to give up all the others for him. But though her father smiled down into her sweet face, and pressed the hand she slipped under his arm, he sighed. He was saying to himself that the lass meant it kindly, but while he knew she was longing to be with Jack he took small comfort from her endearments.

The curtains had been drawn early to-night; but presently Bob rose, walked across the long room, and drew them aside—a flood of silver moonlight poured into the room and reached half-way across it.

“Eh, lad, ye’ll hev a clear light across t’ moor,” Bob said. “’Twill be high tide sune, I’m thinkin’.”

Jack roused up and looked at the tall, pale-faced clock that stood ticking in one corner, as if it were the guardian of the room.

“Zookerins!” he exclaimed. “I could not hev thought t’ time had gone by so fast. ’Tis past nine o’clock. I must be going.”

He came back to the fire and took leave of the farmer and his wife.

Bob stood prepared to follow him, but when he reached the door his mother called out, “Bob, you hev left the coortains agate, fettle ’em, my lad.” And when her son turned to look at her, surprised by such an unnecessary request at such a time, he saw in her eyes that it was merely an excuse to keep *him from following* Jack Walker.

As he turned aside to the window, Elsbeth stole quietly out of the room after her lover.

"Hew!" Bob exclaimed. "Is that t' way on 't! they says farewell i' t' moonlight? Well, it's mighty pleasant, this sweethearting. I sud na moind some o' t' sort mysel'; nobbut I'd nut like to be tied up, so to say, to look at but one lass. I likes to hev plenty to choose among."

"That's well enough now, my lad," his mother said; "you hev a home an' me to fettle for you, but I shall not last your tahme, an' ye mun find a bonny douce lass to keep things ship-shape for you an' father when I'm gone."

"Mother!" Bob said reproachfully, and putting his arm round her neck he gave her a vehement hug.

"I'm thinkin', mother," the farmer took his pipe out of his mouth, "there sud be a picter took of Elsbie and Jack—a black 'un, wiv streaks 'o gold about 'un."

"You sud hev it took on t' wedding-day," said Bob, "when they be come out o' church. Will t' wedding be fixed up at Runswick or at Eastborough, mother?"

Mrs. Filey looked at her husband.

"We heven't fixed it oop," she said. "It hev all come so sudden-like. What do you say, father?"

"Well! We're nigher to Runswick," he said; "but mebbe Jack'll favor Eastborough. I've heerd say that Muster Mitchison an' his lady too are both partial to t' lad; mebbe they'll go to see him spliced if t' wedding's at Eastborough."

He nodded his big head at his wife, but she was *not listening*. It seemed to her that Elsbeth was a

very long time saying good-bye, and she looked towards the door.

Bob laughed, for he guessed what his mother was thinking, and he began to say something teasing about Elsbeth. He began, but he was stopped, a piercing shriek ran through the air, and then came the sound of hurrying feet. The door was flung open, and Elsbeth, pale as the moonlight, rushed into the room.

With her head thrown back, her left hand pressed against her heart, the girl stood still gasping for breath—she tried to speak, but no words came. The others stood looking spelled for an instant by the sight of her terror.

Bob recovered himself first; he rushed to the door, which had slammed to behind Elsbeth, and went out. His movement set her free.

"Help Jack"—she cried—"There's men—murdering Jack. Help, for God's sake, help."

Her father followed Bob, and both men were out of the door before her words ended in a scream of entreaty.

Mrs. Filey went up to her daughter. But Elsbeth showed no symptoms of fainting to-night.

"Hark!" she said, and hurrying to the casement she opened it and looked out.

A heavy cloud was passing over the moon, so that the light was less distinct. There was a bend in the gully just below, and although the girl put her head out of the window she could see nothing—but the sound of a fierce struggle and angry voices reached *her ears, then a heavy fall.* The angry voices ceased, *and a heavy tramp of footsteps followed.* This be-

came less and less distinct, and at last died away. The marauders had evidently departed.

Mother and daughter had stood side by side in perfect silence. Now Mrs. Filey roused, and said abruptly :—

“What had chanced to you, lass?”

Elsbeth stared at her, and then she began to sob.

“I was standing by Jack—we had gone down to see the moonlight on the sea, and we turned an’ stood a bit talkin’ afore we came home. All on a sudden Jack gives a start, an’ there he was struggling with two men, an’ mebbe there was more behind an’ close by. I screamed out, an’ Jack called, ‘Run, lass, run home,’ an’ I ran fast an’ I lost my breath.”

She had calmed while she spoke. Now, as a sudden, terrible conviction flashed on her, she clasped her hands and looked imploringly at her mother.

“Mother, mother, where are they? Why don’t they come in? They should ha’ been back by now.”

She saw terror in her mother’s pale face.

“Come, mother,” the girl went on, “we mun go an’ see. I’ll get t’ lantern.” She shuddered at the dread that had come to her.

Mrs. Filey was so stupefied that she could do little to help Elsbeth; but the girl felt desperate, nerved to act for herself, and she was soon back again with her mother’s cloak and hood, and with a large stable lantern which she had already lighted.

The keen night-air roused Mrs. Filey, and she stepped out as actively as her daughter did.

There was no sign of any one in the lonely place. Elsbeth held her lantern to the ground when they

reached the spot where she thought she had left Jack struggling with his assailants.

"Look, mother," she said, "see where the ground is torn, and look at the footmarks farther on. Come down this way, mother," the girl cried as she went on, holding the lantern close to the ground. "Eh! my mercy, what is that!"

They both stood listening, holding their breaths with terror, for each of them thought she had heard a groan.

"Robert, Robert!" the mother cried. She was more anxious for her husband than for the younger men. It seemed to her that Bob might have rescued Jack, and then gone over the moor with him, to see him safe on his way, but her husband would not have done that; he would have come back to reassure her and Elsbeth, unless something had happened to him.

For an instant the silence seemed deepened after her agonized cry had rung through the air; then a groan sounded close beside them.

"Eh, show the light, lass!" cried Mrs. Filey. "Here, here; hold it this way, my bairn."

But before the feeble lantern-light had found out the spot, the clouds had drifted from the moon, and the moonlight fell pale and clear on a bulky figure, only a few yards beyond the two women.

Mrs. Filey snatched at the lantern and held it close to the face which was turned towards the bank.

She drew her breath through her teeth, but she did *not* cry out—

"*Eh, lass,*" she said, "*'tis what I've been fearin'— 'tis father.*"

PART VII.

DOUBTS.

A YEAR has gone by since that sad night when Elsbeth and her mother found Farmer Filey lying senseless in the gully.

They went back to the house and roused the cowman, who slept in an out-building beyond the farm, and who had heard nothing of the disturbance. With his help the two women managed to raise the stunned man, and to bring him home. But he was ill for some weeks afterwards, and the doctor said the blow on his head had been so severe that he had had a narrow escape of losing his life.

Jack and Bob had disappeared as completely as though the earth had gaped and swallowed them; but the cutter outside the harbor had also departed, and the feeling against the press-gang became stronger than ever in the town of Eastborough.

Mr. Mitchison was reported to have expressed himself very strongly on the subject; John Walker was, he said, a man not to be readily replaced; he was in every way a loss to him, and he would be wasted as a common sailor just at this time when naval engagements were frequent, and so many superior men had lost their lives.

"Well, he's sure of promotion," he added, "though when a man has been bred to the merchant service he seldom takes to the navy."

"There's small comfort in that, I fear," said Mrs. Mitchison, "poor fellow, and poor lass too! I drove out to Filey Farm and saw Elsbeth yesterday, and she is just a wreck, poor soul."

This was true, and now, some months since Mrs. Mitchison's visit, Elsbeth's round pretty face was still thin and pinched, and her rosy color had left her. She was very silent too, and this greatly depressed her father.

The mother pined for her lost son, but she had to rouse herself, or the cheerfulness of the home would have been completely clouded.

Mr. Aislachie, from the mill on the moor, half-way between the farm and Eastborough, had shown much sympathy with the bereaved family; and little by little his visits had become, first frequent, and then regular, so that at this time, just a year since the catastrophe, he used to appear about twice a week and smoke a pipe with the farmer.

To-day Mr. and Mrs. Filey had come to the door with the miller when he departed, and they stood looking after him till he had climbed the side of the gully and stood on the moor.

"Eh, but he's a fine man," the farmer said.

Mrs. Filey sighed.

"He's far gone on our Elsbeth, poor lad," she said.

"He'd mak' her a good husband. Nobbut he's mebbe a trifle older than the lass is; but that'll not count twenty years hence."

Mrs. Filey's eyebrows were raised in mild surprise.

"Are you meaning that you would wish to see *Elsbeth* give up Jack? Eh, but I am surprised at *you, Robert.*"

There came a flush into her usually pale face, and the farmer looked uneasy. He raised his thick red eyebrows, then let them fall again, pushed out his under lip as if to take counsel with it; finally he plunged his right hand into his upright shock of hair, and stood with his mouth open.

"Well, lass," he said slowly, after thinking over her words, "why should our bairn nut marry t' miller? He's not forty yet, an' he's a decent, God-fearing lad; an' he keeps a civil tongue in his head; an' he's as thrivin' and well-to-do a man as ye'll find a miller to be."

"I dunnut say ye nay," his wife answered, "he's all you say, Robert, and mebbe he is more besides; but how can a lass that has promised to marry a man take back her word an' pass it on to another, afore the first lover has gi'en her back her troth? Nay, lad, it wad not be just or true, an' you know our Elsbeth is true an' honest as t' day; besides," she added in a matter-of-fact tone that contrasted quaintly with her words, "how could she bear to think of sweethearting an' marrying, wiv t' poor lads, mebbe, lying in a foreign prison, or wounded in a hospital wiv nowt but foreign vittils to eat."

"Whisht!" the farmer had become impatient, "you women-folk donnut understand men-folk. I have telled you this, lass, many's the time, an' more especially about sailors. Bob is bound to come home one o' these days, if so be his life is spared to him, but, mind ye, lass, there's no saying the same about Jack. It's as likely as not he'll hev fancied another lass, an', in that case, he will keep clear of East-borough."

Mrs. Filey drew up her head and a slight look of scorn settled on her comely face.

"Eh, Robert, wad ye hev the lass set the pattern of forgetting him? Elsbeth is too like her father to be unsteadfast. I hev telled you many's the time that you donnut study yer Bible enow: gif you had, you'd perceive how 'twas the women 'at set the pattern for steadfastness. They was last at t' cross an' first at t' sepulchre. Nay, my man, nobbut I'm willing when Jack gives her up that Elsbeth sud not go on wearing t' willow as if she was forsaken-like; but, what I say is, let him give her up, an' if he's a livin' man, he'll not do that, Robert; so now you know."

The farmer shrugged his high broad shoulders till the drab coat on them seemed to touch his ears.

"Hev it your own way" he said. "Dang it, lass, you donnut think I speak to please mysel', not I. Hev you taken notice o' the dear lass whiles she comes in aff the moor? I met her yesterday an' her face was as white an' pinched, an' her sweet eyes was scared-like as if she'd seen a ghost."

"She's on the moor now, poor soul!" her mother said.

The farmer made no answer. When he had once taken an idea into his head it was difficult to dislodge it he felt sure his child was unhappy, and he thought, though he kept this part of his belief to himself, that Jack Walker was dead. He was more hopeful about Bob; a young lad like that would have less chance of finding means of communicating with his friends *than Jack* would, for the sailor could make himself

understood in more than one language besides English.

Well, then, Jack being dead, the farmer argued, why should his darling waste the best part of her youth in a vain expectation of her lover's return when there was an honest, personable man like the miller willing and eager to take her?—a well-to-do man, who could give her all she had been used to and more, seeing that Miller Aislabie's grandfather and father had been well-to-do men before him, and each of them had had only one child, so that there had been no dividing of the substance which each had left behind. But the farmer did not think of persuading his daughter to take this course; it only seemed to him that if his wife would see the matter as he did, Elsbeth would naturally fall into the same views, and she would, in the end, accept Miller Aislabie.

Farmer Filey walked towards the moor, smoking his pipe as he went, with his head sunk on his broad chest. Away inland, when he looked up, he could still see the miller, now a mere speck on the brown and green stretch of moor.

Spring was close at hand. She had already wakened the brambles from their winter sleep; the bilberries had begun to show tender green leaves; and here and there a plot of fresh grass made a vivid contrast to the grey white of the bent beside it. There was, however, no springlike hopefulness in the clouds; they hung low, a brooding, monotonous grey canopy stretching as far as eye could reach on all sides. It was a trifle lighter towards Eastborough,

and the farmer turned to look in this direction. The sad grey look of everything depressed him to-day.

A figure was moving towards him, but it was still too far off to be distinctly made out. Presently he saw that what had seemed to be one figure suddenly appeared as two, and one, the smaller of the two, was evidently hurrying towards the part of the moor where he was, while the other stood still, against a background of far-stretching country; for the busy fishing-town was completely hidden by the swell of rising ground on the moor.

He knew that it was Elsbeth who came hurrying towards him. So heedlessly did she come that every now and then she stumbled over the grass tussocks among the heather. The farmer, slow to take in a fresh idea, was rapid in acting on one as soon as it came.

Something ailed the bairn. He hurried to meet her and looked beyond her at the other figure. It was now moving, but in the direction of Eastborough.

"Father, father!" Elsbeth cried, and stretching out her arms she hurried wildly on across the heather and fell sobbing into his arms.

"Mah bairn! whisht, then. Tell father what has chanced. Who was yon?" he cried. "Who'll hev been skearin' ye, dear lass?" all the while rocking her fondly in his strong arms. But he only got incoherent words in answer to his eager questions.

"'Twas the face," the girl shuddered violently, "the wild face!—Oh, father! 'Tis a lass I've seen at Eastborough. I did not call the face to mind afore. *She cursed me and threatened me! She says Jack lies at the bottom of the sea. Oh, father! father!*"

PART VIII.

SELF-BETRAYED.

THE lowering sky had brought the storm it promised, and the weather had cleared. A few days later the fishing-boats came in laden with iris-hued mackerel and dull grey codfish, and there was plenty of stir on the Staiths at Eastborough. Not only the holds were full of glistening fish, but the decks were laden and slippery with them, and were low in the water as they slowly entered the harbor and made their way to the landing-place at its farther end. There were handsome faces in the gang of women that stood ready, some shrouded in woollen shawls, others with pads on their tangled locks, ready and waiting on the steps that led up from the water to the quay. In the boats below the blue-jerseyed men and boys were busy filling the baskets the women waited for. Besides these actual fish-carriers, who slowly mounted the steps each in turn with a basket on her head filled with glittering, lovely-hued fish, there were groups of women and also of men watching the proceedings ; while a little way from the edge of the quay, on a space flagged with large stones, stood the fish auctioneer, with his book and pencil in hand, adjusting his spectacles ready to begin the day's market.

In a few minutes the finest fish had been emptied

from the baskets upon the broad flat stones at his feet. A certain number of fish, however, were carried farther up the Staiths, where a supply of barrels, some empty and others filled with salt, showed that here was a preserving store.

Hetty Graves stood among the group of lookers-on. The old fishwife with whom she lodged was laid up with rheumatism, and Hetty had come on her behalf this morning to buy ling and haddock for the curing process chiefly carried on on the other side of the harbor—a process at which the old fishwife was an adept and Hetty no mean pupil.

It had been remarked among the women that ever since Jack Walker's disappearance Hetty had dressed more quietly, and had been less seen on the quay and the pier than she had been formerly. But not one among them dared to say as much to the tall, strapping young woman; she was too well accredited with the possession of a quarrelsome temper and a violent tongue. So to-day no one ventured to comment on the grey whittle that shrouded her head and shoulders and hid her red-gold locks.

And now the largest boats had unloaded, and at the sound of the auctioneer's voice the crowd moved away to the fish-market.

He was announcing with much superfluous energy that a dozen fine mackerel lay before him at three-pence the lot.

"Look at them," he said; "see them, Solomon Simpson, if ivver you looked on the likes o' sik beauties, glittering till heaven's light seems to lie on the pavement. Eh! will no mother's son on ye better the offer?"

Old Matt Thorp had been trying to make up his mind ; now he gave a hitch to his trowsers. "I'll gi' a halfpenny on't," he said.

"Fourpence," Hetty Graves called out in a clear, masterful voice, that made Matt as angry as if she had slapped his face. He had made up his mind to secure those mackerel, and as he looked at Hetty he felt sure she would go on with the bidding if he tried to take the lot from her, so he let it go.

"I'll flout her for it, saucy lass !" he muttered, for Matt was as fond of having his own way as Hetty was herself.

The market went on briskly. The next lot was a magnificent codfish, which, being put up at half-a-crown, was sold for three shillings. In the midst of the excitement one of the young fishermen lounged up to where Hetty Graves stood, her face almost hidden by her shawl.

"Why, lass," he said, "you're a sight for sore eyes. Where have you been hidin' ? You nivver show oop now." He put his hand familiarly on her arm, but she shook him off.

"Haud your ain, Dick," she said. "I am not for you, an' you know it."

Matt Thorp thought he saw his opportunity, for he knew young Dick Skirby would stand by him. "Dang it, lass !" he said, "there be no mortal use in keeping yoursel' for ane as donnut care to take you. I had a crack with Jack Walker the day he was took off, and I knaws what I knaws."

It was so very unusual to see anyone who dared openly to dispute Hester's words, that the crowd of

eager listeners gathered closer round the three speakers, and the auctioneer, seeing that the attention of his customers was distracted, put his pen behind his ear and began also to listen.

A red light flamed in Hetty's dark eyes. She flung her shawl open as if it fretted her, and she stretched out one shapely arm, pointing at Matt, and flouting her hand at him.

He was in an extra sturdy humor, and the loss of the mackerel rankled. He looked slowly round the crowd of excited listeners waiting for Hetty's next words.

"You awd dotard," she said, "what's your knowing worth?"

The bitter contempt in her action and in her voice stung the old man; but he kept outwardly calm.

"Eh, Hetty? Sall I mak' my meanin' plain? Sall I say, Donnut waste your time waiting for a lad as has set his love on anither lass?"

Hetty turned a deathlike white; then the blood flew back vividly to her bonny face; the full tide seemed even to glow among her rich red hair.

"You're a sneaking coward," she said through her closed teeth, in a tone that made some of the listeners shiver, it was so piercingly significant; "an' cowards had best leave me alone. I can reet mysel' an' punish those that wrang me. Ask Elsbeth Filey if Hetty cannot take her revenge."

A deep silence followed. Even the children on the skirts of the crowd left off play and looked into *their* mothers' scared faces with wide, wondering eyes,

The auctioneer, an old, white-haired man, was the first to recover from the shock her words had given.

"Was it thou, Hester Graves," he pointed his finger at her, "a lass as has lived among us all these years, that gave Jack Walker to t' press-gang? I allus said there must ha' bin notice given by one as knawed, but thou! Stony-hearted traitor, to sell the lad and to go nigh to break his lass' heart! Go!"

He stepped forward and gave Hetty a push that sent her against Matt Thorp.

The old sailor seemed to recoil from her touch. He pushed her roughly away.

"Shame on ye!" he said. "You are not fit to be wiv honest folk—to sell the lad you loved! Shame on you!"

His push was rougher than the auctioneer's. A woman was standing near who had known Jack's mother, and she struck fiercely at Hester as she staggered against her. "Shame on ye, traitor!" she cried. Hetty tried to defend herself, but each time she spoke she was hooted down; everyone she approached shrank from her or pushed her roughly away. She was cowed by the abhorrence she saw in every face.

When she had struggled to the bridge she turned round and tried to speak. She had got beyond the crowd, and there seemed to be no one to molest her here.

But the auctioneer and Matt Thorp were before her. "Hold your tongue!" "Traitor!" was shouted from the concourse. "Out of our sight! Away wiv ye!" rose up in a clamor that drowned her words.

Very soon the fish-market and the adjoining part of the Staiths was a clear space. The crowd had vanished behind the houses.

Anger and terror maddened the miserable girl. She fled across the bridge and began to climb the narrow, steep streets of the Old Town, as this part of Eastborough was called. She had not time to think in ; with the instinct of a hunted beast she was rushing for shelter to the home she shared with the old fish-wife near the fish-drying huts up on the cliffs. On she went, heedless of the curious eyes that strove to peer under her shawl. She was no longer the erect, self-conscious beauty of the Staiths. She was thankful to hide her bowed head, for it seemed as if her crime dogged at her heels and would proclaim itself to every passer-by.....

But the news had gone before her. At the moment of her self-betrayal the crowd had thickened behind her by men and women who pressed up from the boats eager to hear her words and the condemnation passed on her ; the intelligence had been gathered in with a marvelous rapidity, and with it the longing to spread the news, for Hetty was not a favorite among the women. First one woman and then another pushed their way out from among the excited folk and crossed the bridge on their way homeward.

As they went, these fishwives told the story ; the bitter shame brought to the town of Eastborough by one of its own people. But two of these heralds did *not loiter* and gossip over their news ; they had *evidently* a purpose in their minds, and although

they had not spoken of it, yet each guessed the other's purpose.

At last these two paused before the door of Hester's lodging. They knew of the old fish-curer's illness, and they unlatched the door and went up to her bedside.

"Alison," one said, "thee mustn't harbor a fause heart like Hester Graves. She is accursed. She mun flee."

The frightened old woman sat up in bed with staring eyes, her face an ashen grey against the white borders of her large nightcap. The two figures beside her, with harsh, uncouth faces showing under the shawls that covered their heads and shoulders, looked frightful enough to be witches, but their grim features were well-known to poor pain-racked Alison. She questioned them, and as she learned the sad story of Hester's treachery her pale face flushed; she too was filled with loathing against the girl who had proved so false to the man she professed to love.

But she made no comment on the tale.

"Have you steekit the door, bairns?" she said harshly.

One of the women went to the door and drew a heavy bar across it. Then Alison pointed to an oak chest at the end of the low-roofed room.

"Her claithes bides in yon kist," she said. "Have a care how you fettle them: they be gude claithes. You can gi' 'em to her when she cooms."

Then Alison hid her head under the bedclothes. She had done what she knew was expected of her; but it wrung her hospitable soul to turn Hetty, *bad as she was*, from under her roof.....

Presently Hetty came hurrying to the door and tried to open it. Her heart stood still when she found it fast. But she did not try to force an entrance; she felt too sure that some one was within with Alison.

She went round to the window and looked in. One of the women stood there waiting for her, and she saw that the other was on her knees beside the open chest.

No one spoke; Hetty's tongue seemed to be paralyzed; she felt turned to stone. Presently a large bundle of clothes, and then a small packet of money, were handed to her; not one word was said, but the open casement was sharply closed and fastened.

When Hester turned away she found herself hemmed in; quite a little crowd of women and children had gathered round to witness her expulsion.

PART IX.**AGAIN ON THE MOOR.**

IT was a bright May-day, full of sunshine and also with a sweetness in the air not too often found in the month of spring flowers; there was no bitter, tearing element in the breeze that blew a man's curly hair into his eyes and so gave him work for both brown hands; for he was forced to keep his straw hat on his head with one of them, while the other dashed the stray locks from his eyes.

In those days there was no railway to Eastborough, and Jack Walker had had a good long journey from Hull, where he had landed, for he only got occasional lifts in the carriers' carts between one town and another. Coming up this way the town and villages he passed through were all strange to him, and he hungered sorely for news of the dear ones he was on his way to see.

He judged he was about six miles or so from Eastborough, when he found himself on a wide expanse of seemingly trackless moor. The path he had been following dwindled, and then ended suddenly under a group of whin-bushes. Jack hoped to recover it by skirting these bushes; but he soon found himself surrounded by brambles, and at his feet was a bright green treacherous-looking swamp. He managed to get round this, and, looking ahead,

he saw a moving object at no great distance. This encouraged him to go on. As he looked, he felt sure it was a woman, and she would probably be able to point out the track to him.

"There must be a path somewheres," he said cheerfully, "or a woman could not have got here."

He could see the woman plainly now; she had seated herself on the ground, and he decided that she must be a gipsy. Her face was hidden by the drooping brim of her large black hat, and in this was a red feather. The rest of her clothes seemed to be at once torn and tawdry; there was no trace in them of the sombre rough skirts of the north country peasant women. But it was the hat that amused Jack. He had never seen such a one out of a theatre, although he believed they were worn by "the quality," and it darted across his mind that she might be one of a company of strolling players who were perhaps bivouacking on the moor.

"Good day t' ye, mistress," he said, when he came up to the woman.

She gave so sudden a start that plainly she had not observed his approach, and she threw back her head to see him better.

Jack started, too, when he saw the face that the flapping hat had till now concealed; it was a bloodless face, and there was no lustre in the dark eyes that scanned him, or on the crown of dull red hair above them; the eyes stared at him vacantly, and the lips were parted with a sort of foolish wonder. *All at once something in the sailor's attitude seemed to strike her, and she rose up swiftly and put her hand on his arm.*

"Are you fra the sea?"

An eager look of expectation lightened over her face, and he gave a start of recognition; the gesture, the smile, the lips eager with question, were those of Hetty Graves—and yet he fell back a step and looked at her from head to foot. How could this be Hetty?

"Yes," he said, "I only landed a day or so ago. Who are you?"

She held up her finger and shook her head at him.

"Whisht," she said softly, "you munna speak so high; 'tis a secret, an' nobbut Jack knows it. Eh, but he's bonny, my Jack, an' he's coomin, coomin home to me. Ye know sik a lad on t' sea, mebbe? They call him Jack Walker."

Jack was terribly shocked. A strange tenderness filled her eyes, but she evidently looked on him as a stranger.

"I am Jack Walker," he said.

Hetty snapped her fingers at him and burst into a loud, ringing laugh. "My sakes!" she cried, "to hear the likes o' that! Dost think I dunno Jack Walker? Nay, my lad, gin you were Jack I'd kiss ye. Eh, there's monny a bairn that wad gi' his right hand for a kiss fra Hetty, but she's for noane but Jack—" She sighed deeply. "Eh, but I hev waited a weary spell for t' lad."

Jack was shocked into silence; he felt that his best course was to pass on without another word, but the question came almost without his will.

"Do you know how the Fileys are? Elsbeth Filey?"

Hetty gave him a keen glance, full of suspicion, then she put her hand to her head.

"Nay," she said sadly, "I've been trying, but I cannot mind where I've seen your bonny face afore. Mebbe you're one o' Elsbeth's sweethearts—an' I'm sorry for ye." A cunning look came into her eyes. "The poor lass was drowned in the creek. Drowned. Eh, but 'twas a sair ending."

A horrible suspicion flashed on Jack.

"Murderess!" he said, and he tried to seize her, but his face had given Hetty warning and she fled away from him swiftly.

He followed at a headlong pace, and in a moment or two he was floundering in a swamp. By the time he had extricated himself Hetty had disappeared.

It was still early afternoon when Jack Walker reached Eastborough. He had left the moor for the high road about a mile or so before he reached the town. At that time the road did not extend much farther. He could not have told how he had come thither. Hetty's words seemed to have fired his brain, and as he rushed along he felt crazed with a burning longing to know if the mad woman's fatal news was the truth.

But as the well-known red-roofed houses came in sight, and he saw far away on the outstretching cliff the brown ruins of the far-famed abbey, the dread seemed lifted from the sailor's heart, and hope took its place. Hetty was mad, or she would have recognized him, and her words might only be the ravings of insanity.

Jack stood still at the entrance of the town. Why should he enter it? Why should he expose himself to the delay which must ensue if he met any acquaintance? Why should he not keep to the higher ground on his left and strike out for the moor without entering Eastborough? But the next minute he saw that this circuit would nearly double the distance, and he was already footsore with the journey he had made. So he avoided the Staiths, and keeping to the higher street behind, he had nearly reached the cliff when he came at once face to face with Matt Thorp, who appeared suddenly at the angle of the lane that led up from the quay.

"Woonkers!" cried Matt, "here's a sight!" Then as he shook the young man's hand vehemently he cried, "I'm real glad on it, Jack, that I am. I'se allus said as you'd coom back if so be as you was above ground."

"What d'ye mean?" said Jack sharply. "Who said I should stay away?"

"Whisht, lad, you hev coom back, so there's nowt for nobody's tongue to wag about; mebbe you'll hev to give an account o' yerself," he winked. "Eh, but you'll find awesome changes, mah lad. You mind that puir lass, Hetty Graves? Well, she's gane clean daft for love o' you, folks say."

"I met her on the moor, then!" Jack pointed to the way he had come, "and she did not know me; but I want to know——"

"Eh,"—Matt shook his head—"I'm thinkin' you are stony-hearted, lad. You sud ha' brought her home to be cared for; they hev been seeking her far and

wide, an' Farmer Filey says as she's not safe to be at large. Safe! as if the puir bairn wad——"

"Tell me," interrupted Jack, "are the Fileys well—all of them?"

"Nay"—Matt Thorp solemnly shook his head, thereby giving Jack such a spasm of anguish that he had to clench his fists to control it—"they say the puir lass Elsbeth has pined and pined till she's more like a ghaist than the bonny lass you left behind you."

"Thank God!" said Jack devoutly. The old fisherman eyed him grimly. "Eh, but that's a strange thanksgiving, my lad. Nobbut you're a bit dazed. Where's t' other lad."

"Bob Filey?" Jack looked grave. "He's comin', but I left him behind; 'tis along o' he that I've not been back afore. We was took prisoners by t' French, but at last we got away; the poor lad's arms was broke, an' we had to lie close till he could make the journey—but 'tis too long a yarn, Matt, I'm wearying to set eyes on mah lass."

Matt felt defrauded; but he knew that he could not keep pace with Jack's strides; so he nodded and bade him "God speed;" then he re-filled his pipe and stood smoking till he had watched the sailor out of sight.

Matt's words had brought such intense relief to Jack that he seemed to go at double speed; but when he stood in the farm porch his hopes fell again.

It was all so still, it seemed as if the place was deserted. He went to the window and looked in. The room was empty and there was a very little fire on the hearth.

Jack shivered. He stole quietly away and went down the gully towards the sea. He stopped just at the point where he had been violently torn from Elsbeth. Even now he seemed to see her slight figure fleeing away in obedience to his cry. A cry had parted them—if he cried out her name would the cry bring her back to him?

“Elsbeth, Elsbeth,” he called, “my own lass, come back to me!” and with the words big drops fell from Jack’s eyes; his own voice had drawn them forth—the pathetic wail in it sounded like the outcome of despair.

He stood waiting in mournful silence; he seemed to know he should get his answer here on the very spot whence she had gone from his sight into the darkness.

A soft bleating came presently from the moor, and then the innocent brown and white face of a calf looked down from the edge of the bank overhead.

Jack waited; he could not have moved, and while he kept his eyes fixed on the blue sky above the ragged, tufted edge, the space beside the calf was filled by a figure, and he and Elsbeth were gazing at one another.

Jack scrambled up the bank and took her into his arms.

“The Lord be praised!” he said, reverently.

Then he held Elsbeth from him that he might see her loved face plainly. She had been stunned at first, but he saw that she was reviving from the sudden shock, and tears came again to the strong man’s eyes when he saw how thin and worn the girl was,

"Eh, Jack, honey," she said at last, "is it really you? When I heard t' cry I couldna believe my hearin', an' when I saw you stannin' down there I feared 'twas your sperrit."

They were married within a month at the old church at Eastborough, and before their first child was born they learned that poor mad Hetty had passed peacefully away in the county asylum, where she had been placed soon after her meeting with Jack.

Mrs. Filey never tired of telling the events of that strange and terrible night when Jack was seized by the press-gang; and she always ended up with the same reflection—

"It couldna ha' chanced nobbut Pete had been to the fore. Pete wad ha' skeared the skulkin' vagabonds."

THE END!

MERCANTILE LIBRARY,
— * —
OF NEW YORK.

